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PRIVATEER TOM.

By the Author of "Captain Tom Drake."



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PRIVATEER TOM.

A SEQUEL TO CAPTAIN TOM DRAKE.

By the Author of "Captain Tom Drake."

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN TOM DRAKE ENTERS UPON HIS NEW CAREER.

"FAREWELL, Minnie darling, my own little wife. My country has need of me, and you shall yet hear your husband's name in connection with the stirring deeds which these troublous times will produce. Farewell, dear, and may Heaven keep you safe until my return."

"Not farewell, Tom, for I know that you will return to me with a brighter record than ever before. May the God of battles spare you and bring you safe back from a thousand perils."

The first speaker was a young man of a little more than twenty years, well formed and handsome, frank and manly in bearing, whose every word, look and movement, bespoke the hero, as indeed he was.

The readers of the BOYS' WEEKLY will remember the gallant adventures, hair-breadth escapes and stirring encounters of the famous boy privateer, Captain Tom Drake, and he therefore needs no further introduction.

It will be remembered, also, that at the close of the first recital of his adventures, published in these columns, he was about to depart for the seat of war, having accepted a commission from the American government, then just going to war with Great Britain.

The period at which this story begins is in the summer of the year 1812, just after the famous victory of Captain Porter, commanding the *Essex*, over the *Alert*, a British war vessel of twenty guns, the first one taken since the war had actively commenced.

Tom was now about to take command of his vessel, the *Firefly*, of twenty-four guns, as stanch and saucy a craft for her size as ever flew the American flag.

The words quoted at the beginning of this chapter, were said to his wife, Minnie, once Minnie Atherton, but now united to her boy-lover after many trials and adventures.

With Tom, on the *Firefly*, were many of his old comrades and friends, their fates seeming to be linked with his as in the old days, when he was but a saucy privateer, sailing under no flag but his own, and proscribed by the government of which he had once been a loyal subject, until forced by its despotism and the treachery of his own relatives to seek more congenial friends.

Harry Vere, his brave associate for many years, now wedded to the beautiful Jennie Ellis, the daughter of the arrogant English commander, was his first officer, and gave promise of doing as effectual service in the future as he had in the past, being greatly loved and honored by the young commander, who well remembered how closely their fortunes had been united.

Ben Barnacle, the giant boatswain, who, although holding an inferior position, had always seemed to have a strange and powerful influence over our hero, was with him still, as was also that other mysterious personage, known by no other name than that of Iron Arm, from his great strength.

Bob Hauler and Jerry Mizzen, the latter having escaped from the British fleet after many perilous adventures, which he was always fond of relating, were again with their beloved captain, and sure to be appointed upon any duty of importance, being as trustworthy now as when they were first made acquainted with the boy privateer.

Doctor Shrike and his assistant, Jacob, were in their old place in the surgery, the former possessing the same grim humor and love for his ghastly profession as ever, and caring to serve no other commander than the gallant Tom Drake.

Having thus brought our characters once more upon the stage, we will ring up the curtain, to use another theatrical expression, and will proceed with the recital of the sequel to our hero's adventures, which have already endeared his name to every boyish heart.

* * * * *

"Whither bound, captain?"

The words were addressed to the young commander by Ben Barnacle, the *Firefly* having suddenly changed her course two days out from land.

Tom was seated in his luxurious cabin, having preserved his old privateer manners, looking over a mass of charts, papers and documents when the man spoke, and looking up, he said, pleasantly:

"Ah, Ben, is that you? I understand your interest, and will not leave it unsatisfied. You are as much my confidant as Harry Vere, here, himself."

"And even I have yet to learn the meaning of this sudden change," spoke up Vere, who was seated at one side of the table. "I had asked him the same question, Ben, just before you entered, but had received no reply."

"Not because I meant to give you none, however," said Tom, with a laugh, twisting the ends of his long mustache carelessly, "but I was about to send for Ben to join us as he came upon us."

"You do me honor," answered Ben, taking the seat to which Tom beckoned him by a graceful wave of the hand, "and nothing but our long acquaintance and friendship would have induced me to intrude upon your privacy."

"You will recollect," said Tom, after a pause, "that my treacherous cousin, Reuben Harpy, was reported to have been in command of an English privateer, having been furnished by that scoundrel, Sanderson, with false letters of marque."

"Sanderson and Angel—a misnomer, surely, for he was a perfect devil—have both paid the penalty of their crimes," said Ben, quietly.

"And Reuben shall do likewise, or I greatly mistake," continued Tom. "Too long has this villain practiced his vile trade, and I promise him that when we meet one of us shall die, and it shall not be Tom Drake."

"And has this sudden change in your course to do with him?" queried Vere.

"It has, although it has been my intention from the start to seek the villain out, and I merely took the direction I did to deceive the enemy."

"They have heard of our departure, and are doubtless looking for us on the northern coast."

"Instead of which we shall be at Barbadoes or even further South. The *Firefly* is true to her name, and flits hither and thither in the most unexpected manner."

"Do you hope to find Reuben in the neighborhood of Barbadoes?" asked Ben.

"I expect to hear of him there. You remember our old friend Israel Shawm?"

"The dog of a Jew who very nearly betrayed us to the enemy after our fight with Dutch Paul? Indeed I do, and I have long wished to punish him for his knavery."

"Then you must forbear awhile, for I have need of Israel yet. It is my intention to call upon the wily Hebrew and obtain news of Reuben at once."

"A clever plan; but are you not neglecting your country's interests while carrying out your own personal designs?"

"Not so, for our aim is to cripple the enemy on every side, and if we can capture a few rich merchantmen before we engage a war-vessel, so much the better."

"And so you think that you will meet—"

"I know I shall, for I have already been advised of the sailing of several. Having a roving commission, I am at liberty to go where I please, and for the present I please to cruise around Barbadoes and the neighboring islands."

"Beware of Israel Shawm, however, for he is a treacherous hound, and will bite when you least expect it."

"I shall not shun him, for I do not fear him. I know his evil ways, and shall therefore be the better prepared to thwart him."

Ten days later, at dusk, the *Firefly* dropped anchor in a little cove on the Barbadoes coast, and Tom prepared to go ashore in one of the small boats.

He was attired in the full uniform of a Brazilian naval officer, Ben Barnacle, Iron Arm, Bob and Jerry being clad as seamen in the same service, the *Firefly* being also dressed to represent a cruiser of that nation, provided any curious eyes should discover her hiding-place.

Harry Vere remained on board, and, giving him a hearty handshake, Tom dropped over the side into the boat and was presently scudding over the water toward the shore.

Leaving Bob and Jerry to take charge of the boat, Tom and his two comrades proceeded at once into the town, the young commander walking at some distance from the others, as befitting his rank, and before long he stood before the crafty Jew's dwelling.

"Impudence befriend me now," said Tom, "for I have need of all my assurance. Nothing venture, nothing win. So here goes."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE LAIR OF THE FOE—IMPORTANT NEWS—A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE Jew was seated in his own private apartment when a servant entered and informed him that a visitor, a Brazilian, waited without and desired an interview.

"Aha, te Prazilians and de Chilians always fight," chuckled Israel. "That makes a goot peeze for me. Fairst, I shell one and den I shell de oder. Ah, by my gown, I makes monish out of dat fight. Dey poth puy de gunpowdersh of old Israel, and he don't care if dey cutsh each odeish throats eef he makes de monish from it."

This was said by the old fox to himself, after having dispatched the servant with the message that he would be pleased to see the visitor, and he was still chuckling to himself when Tom entered.

Besides wearing the Brazilian uniform, Tom had otherwise disguised himself, coloring his skin and putting on false mustache and beard so as to be utterly unrecognizable.

Just before his entrance, however, he had encountered Hester, the pretty daughter of the old rascal, and she had looked at him in a strangely interesting manner.

Suddenly seizing him by the wrist she held him back, while she whispered impressively:

"It is the brave young Captain Tom come back again! I know him, in spite of disguises."

"You have proved to be my friend before," answered Tom, "and I can trust you now."

"Beware of my father," said the lovely Jewess, "for if he discovers your secret you will be betrayed."

"Do you think he will know me in this dress and with my face and beard?"

"Perhaps not, but you must be cautious. If he attempts any treacherous act I will warn you in time."

"Oh, Hester," said Captain Tom, gravely, "if there were more like you in the world we should be much better off."

Then, as the girl glided away, he entered the Jew's apartments, and passing on into the last of all, came before the old scoundrel himself.

"Israel Shawm, I believe," said Tom, with a slight foreign accent. "I wish to see you on an important and most delicate mission. We are alone?"

"Yesh, my tear, we are quite alone. You Prazilians are te mostest cautious fellersh I efer shee. Vot ish your pishness? You vant to puy te gunpowdersh?"

"Oh, no, we have quite enough of that at present," replied Tom, remembering the trick the old villain had formerly played upon him.

"I thought you wouldn't vant te gunpowdersh, my tear, ash I soldt a hoondred parrels to te Captainsh Alvarez lasht veek. You haf not met te captainsh?"

"Alvarez?" repeated Tom. "There's no such name among our officers now. You have been deceived. The fellow is no Brazilian."

"I know tat as vell ash yourshelf, my tear, and I wash not desheived. Hish name wash Reuben Harpy, and he fight mit de Pritish. He wash a raschal, but I makes de monish from him, and vot do I caresh?"

"Ha—ha! this is important news," thought Tom. "I must pump this old villain and learn more."

Then, spreading out a roll of documents upon the table, he sat down and said:

"I have reason to suspect that this man of whom you speak has obtained by fraud certain papers, which make him appear to be in the Brazilian service, whereas he is little better than a pirate. The government offers a large reward for his capture, and if you could give me any reliable information that would lead to that result you would not be forgotten."

"But te man ish a cushtomer of mine, and I could not pe so base."

"Oh, that alters the case. I suspect, however, that this man Harpy, would easily be induced to come to the island, if he knew that one Captain Drake was in the neighborhood."

"Py my peard, you mean dat raschal, Tom Drake, te poy privateer, ash tey call him?" cried Israel, springing to his feet.

"Yes, I passed his vessel yesterday. She is called the *Night Hawk*, and he is cruising."

"Te *Night Hawk*! Py my pody, I was apout to shell him some gunpowdersh; te quarter-mashty ashk me to shell him to-morrow, and I shay I will."

"Don't leave yet," said Tom, the Jew having become very uneasy. "I have other matters to speak of."

"It ish not bishness. Come! to-morrow, I wash indisposed to-night. Where is your veshel anchored? I did not see her come in."

"On the southeast shore," answered Tom, this being directly opposite to the *Firefly's* real position.

"I come to shee you in te morning," said Israel, ringing a silver bell that stood near him.

As the sound died away, Hester herself entered, bearing a gold tray upon which was a flagon of wine and two silver cups nicely engraved, and set with jewels.

"The wine you asked me to bring, father," she said, putting the tray down, and pouring out and handing to Tom a cup of wine.

Her eyes fell as she did so, and Tom, looking into the cup, saw a silver bullet at the bottom.

Divining at once that the girl had heard something and wished to warn him, Tom raised the cup, and said:

"I drink to our better acquaintance, Israel Shawm, and confusion to all traitors."

Then he emptied his cup, allowing the bullet to remain in one corner of his mouth. When, taking up his hat, he quickly bowed himself out, leaving the astonished Jew alone with his daughter.

"Pody of me, Hester," said the wretch, turning livid with rage, "tish wash not te man I wanted te wine for. You vill ruin me. Py my

peard, it vash Alvarez, te man vat I told you yesh-terday."

"You said to come when you rang, and so I did."

"Py my robe I forgot dat. I ring for te black slave."

"But I sent him away."

"Sent him pack to me, then, and don't make such a mishdake again."

"I will do as you bid," said the girl, and then she left the room, knowing that there was more work for her to do if she would save Tom Drake from her treacherous father.

By this time Tom had reached the street, and by the light of the tropic moon was reading a scrap of paper which had been concealed in the middle of the bullet found in the wine.

He was familiar with ruses of this sort, and almost as soon as he had left the room had unsevered the two parts of the bullet, and taken out the thin, silk-like paper it contained.

When in the moonlight he found that it was indeed a message of warning, as he supposed, the words being as follows:

"CAPTAIN TOM: Your old enemy, Reuben Harpy, was here but yesterday. I have just discovered the fact from the black slave. I fear that my father knows you. Be at the Grapes tavern on the shore at midnight and I will send you the latest news."

HESTER."

"So, so; this is worth knowing," muttered Tom, as he hurried off, giving his two followers the signal to join him at a distance.

"The old villain is going to supply gunpowder to the *Night Hawk*, is he?" he muttered. "Good. I know what its quality will be if he takes her for my vessel; and when I draw her out a day or so hence she will be an easy prey."

"It was well I discovered her, and also that she has lately arrived like myself. Can Reuben still be in port? The time will drag till midnight, when I shall probably know more."

Stepping into a dark archway, the young captain waited until the two men came up, when he told them of what he had heard and done, and asked them if they had any news for him.

"The *Night Hawk* is taking in supplies," said Ben, "and there have been two new arrivals—British war-vessels—this very night. Several rich merchant vessels are reported to be approaching, bound for England, and those fellows are to go to their protection."

"Is my presence here, then, suspected?"

"No, but other American cruisers have been seen, and they are getting cautious."

"Keep your eyes and ears open, and meet me outside the Grapes at midnight. I will have the boat taken around to that part of the coast."

Then they separated, Tom wrapping himself in a heavy black cloak, which utterly concealed both form and features, and thus disguised, went about where the British sailors on liberty would be most likely to congregate, to see if he could not pick up some news.

As the hour of twelve was sounded from the cathedral towers and taken up by the watchmen upon their rounds, he stood in front of the tavern known as the Grapes, and a moment later a muffled figure appeared from within and advanced toward him.

"St! Is that the young captain?" asked the figure, which Tom now perceived to be that of the peerless young Jewess herself.

"Yes," he answered, coming near. "Have you heard anything?"

"Much that is strange and startling. I have tried to find you before, but could not."

"There is haste, then?"

"Of a truth. Your coward cousin has departed an hour hence in his vessel, the *Terror*, and the *Night Hawk* will be watched with the utmost care."

"Does your father—"

"He does not suspect you nor your vessel, but thinks that the *Night Hawk* is yours. He has betrayed her, as he imagines, and when she leaves the British vessels here will fire upon and sink her."

"She is English?"

"Yes, but on a private mission, and none of her crew have been ashore, which increases the suspicion against her."

"Then I must let her own friends destroy her, for if Reuben has departed I shall follow at once."

"He has gone, for when my father told him your vessel was here, his face was bloodless in a moment."

"I will overtake the scoundrel, and when I have given him the punishment he deserves, will capture these expected merchant-men while yet these stupid fellows are sinking one of their own ships!"

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE—JERRY MIZZEN'S NARRATIVE.

"Two sails on the port bow, captain," said Jerry Mizzen, as Tom came on deck the next morning.

The *Firefly* was well out to sea by that time, the young commander having got up sail and sped away as soon as he had learned from Hester of his dastard cousin's departure.

"What do you make them out to be, Jerry?" asked Captain Tom.

"They're English, fast enough."

"Is one the *Terror*, commanded by that rascal Harpy?"

"She's a war-vessel, I take it, sir."

"Yes."

"Well, neither of these is that. They're merchants."

"The very fellows we were looking for. There is no harm in catching them now and settling Mr. Reuben's case afterward."

Tom at once sought Harry Vere, and calling him upon the quarter-deck, said, pointing out two sails which were now plainly visible:

"There is a prize for us, Harry, to be snatched right under the noses of these imperious Britons."

"The merchantmen that were expected?"

"Yes; and before the war-vessels can get to their assistance they will be ours."

"Good. This will be a bold stroke."

"Give chase at once, but draw well up on them before making hostile demonstrations."

"Shall we hoist British colors?"

"Sail under the flag of a tyrant? Never! If any disguise is necessary, I shall at least not take that. The hated flag of Great Britain shall never float over my ship while I am in command!"

The words were spoken loudly, and the sailors hearing them, cheered to the echo, Jerry Mizzen saying to his mates as they flew to obey Harry Vane's orders:

"That's the right sort of talk, I tell you. It would have made me nervous to have the enemy's flag floating over me. I remember well the time when I boarded Admiral Ellis' ship and found myself among a lot of British tars."

"By the way, Jerry," said Bob Hauler, when the work had been finished, for the time at least, "you never told me just exactly how you got out of that scrape."

"Didn't I?"

"No."

"Well, it's a long yarn, but I can spin off a bit of it; and if I have to stop, just take a round turn and knot it off, so's to know where to begin again."

"Heave ahead then!"

"Well, you see, being an American in heart, and called a pirate by occupation, I was in mighty danger of having a hempen cravat and dancing on nothing, particularly as that peppery little admiral—blast his eyes!—had got a notion that I belonged to Captain Tom's ship."

"They couldn't pump me, no matter how they tried, and at last they give it up, but kept me, claiming that I was a subject."

"I wasn't a subject for the hangman anyhow, and I trusted to my natural abilities to get away some time and get back to the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, which is another name for *Firefly*, I suppose."

"We put right to sea, and I had to fight the French, though, as they weren't our friends then, I didn't mind. Then they exchanged me into another ship, and I went further away from home than ever."

"One day I got a slight hurt in an engagement off shore, and with the aid of one of my mess-mates resolved to die."

"We fixed the thing up between us, and I was the most natural-looking corpse you ever see, though when they sewed me up in canvas with a shot at my feet, I thought it wur altogether too real, by a good deal."

"They gin me a knife, though, and didn't take too many stitches, though I tell you I did feel kind o' ticklish when that feller's needle would stick into me."

"Well, they said prayers over me, and dumped me into the sea as we was going out o' port at a smashin' gait, and the way that knife o' mine ripped and slashed was a caution."

"Down, down, down I went, till I thought sure I'd drive a hole in the bottom, and all the time ripping away at them stitches like mad, 'cause I was 'feared the burial would be the real thing after all."

"You can imagine how glad I was, Bob, when I felt that 'ere shot break loose from my legs and the canvas shroud fall away from me, and I a shootin' up towards the top like a watery skyrocket."

"I was pretty near used up when I got there, but my mate had chucked over a hen-coop, by

accident, of course, and it came afloatin' my way, as luck would have it.

"They didn't see me aboard the vessel, and I clung to the hen-coop till dark, when I went in shore on the turn of the tide, clean tuckered out.

"My troubles wasn't over, for before I could get out into the country, I was captured by the enemy and sentenced to be hung as a spy.

"I thought it was a pretty go, to escape drownin' only to be hung, and I told 'em they had no business to hang a dead man when there was plenty live ones about.

"That puzzled 'em, and they locked me up for the night while they thought it over. In the mornin' I told 'em I was a Yankee, and offered to fight the Britishers for them.

"It was that what done the business for me, and I was made gunner right off, full pay, grub and grog, beginnin' at that very identical moment.

"I couldn't tell you all the things that happened to me before I finally got away, struck across lots for this country, and found that Captain Tom Drake was to the front ag'in and lookin' for men, and I can tell you that it wasn't long afore Jerry Mizzen had the number of his mess and was spinnin' yarns with his old chums."

"Blow my top-hamper off, but we're hauling up on them fellows," said Bob, at that moment. "There goes our flag; wonder what they'll say to that?"

What they did say was to edge away as rapidly as possible, hoping to save themselves from being captured by the saucy cruiser whom they had at first taken for one of the corvettes sent to protect them.

Captain Tom sent a shot whistling through the fore-rigging of the leading vessel, as an indication that he would not be trifled with, and gave orders to serve the other the same way if she attempted to escape.

The first vessel lay to, but the other tried to get away, fancying that the *Firefly* would have all it wanted to do in looking after the other.

Captain Tom knew what he was about, however, and he gave his orders to Iron Arm, who was one of his most expert gunners, to bring the runaway to terms.

The herculean fellow rammed the charge home, and pointing the gun to a nicety, fired, carrying away the end of the merchant's bowsprit.

The sails came down by the run, and the vessel, losing her headway, fell off and got all aback, being unable to repair the damage before another shot went crashing through the main rigging, and sending all the top-hamper down in a heap.

The *Firefly* had been drawing up all this time, and in a few minutes the two hulls collided, the merchantman's rail being carried away for several feet by the force of the shock.

Grappels were thrown out, and the prize was made fast, the men from the privateer swarming over upon her decks and cutting down all who opposed them.

The captured vessel proving the larger and richer of the two, our hero suffered the other to escape, after first raking her fore and aft with his broadsides.

He would not have done this to a merchantman, had not the latter fired a shot and killed two of his men after having made signs of submission.

The captured vessel proved to have a very rich cargo, much of which was of use to the navy, and Captain Tom was therefore greatly elated at his success.

The captain and crew, not being belligerents, were suffered to depart in boats, the youthful commander having the daring to run close enough in shore with his prize to permit of this.

It was a bold experiment, but at that moment the English cruisers were away, having given chase to the unfortunate *Night Hawk*, and nearly demolished her before they discovered their mistake, and knew that they had been cheated by some clever enemy, though they had no suspicion that the *Firefly* was within a thousand miles.

CHAPTER IV.

FACE TO FACE AND HAND TO HAND.

"If that isn't the *Terror*, with that miscreant, Harpy, on board, I'll never venture another guess."

So spoke Harry Vere, two days after the capture of the merchant vessels, as he paced the quarter-deck early in the afternoon, Captain Tom being at that moment below.

The man on the lookout had reported a strange sail a little while before, and Harry, with a pair of powerful glasses, had been gazing intently at it ever since.

He finally gave vent to the exclamation above

noted, and as he paced the deck excitedly, called out to one of the under officers:

"Tell Captain Drake that there is a strange sail in sight, which I take to be the *Terror*."

The officer at once delivered the message, the boy captain arising hastily and exclaiming:

"Then, by Heaven, this wretch shall at last suffer for all the misery he has caused me and mine."

Then hastily buckling on his sword and clapping his plumed chapeau jauntily on his head, he hastened on deck, where Harry Vere was again looking earnestly at the vessel in the distance through the glasses.

The excitement of the young lieutenant seemed to have communicated itself to the men; for they had crowded into the rigging and were gazing with the most breathless interest at the stranger and exchanging opinions as to her real character.

"She's a fast sailer," said one, "but I fancy the *Firefly* can overhaul her quick enough."

"She don't look like an English-built vessel at all," added another.

"For all that, she seems willin' enough to fight," said Jerry Mizzen. "By the great guns, if she isn't hauling up into the wind so's to let us come up."

"If she's an enemy, she ain't any more anxious to fight than we are," put in Bob Hauler. "I say, Jerry, there'll be work for old Sawbones below, before the sun goes down, if I mistake not."

"Faith, there will, for I saw Jacob just now fetchin' him his saws and tool-chest. He's a grizzly customer, old Shrike is."

"All I wish is that he may have a chance to take off Reuben Harpy's head, and make a clean job of it."

"Avast there, Bob Hauler! Would you cheat our gallant captain out of his revenge? It's him, and him only, that takes off that skunk's head. That's his right and privilege, and nobody ain't going for to deprive him of it."

"From the description I have had of her, that must be the *Terror*, beyond a doubt," muttered Captain Tom, as he scanned the vessel, now much nearer than at first.

"He is anxious to fight, at all events," added Harry Vere.

"Then, by the Power that made us, he shall have his wish!" cried Tom, in great excitement.

Then, in a voice of thunder that could be heard in every part of the ship, he cried aloud:

"Call all hands to quarters! Unlimber the guns! Open the magazine! Distribute arms! Clap on all sail then, and let us see what this fellow wants."

"There goes his bunting," cried Harry, as a dark ball shot up to the peak and hung there for an instant.

"Run up the Stars and Stripes, and nail them to the mast if necessary," called out our hero. "If he wants fight he shall have it."

At the same instant the colors of both vessels were unfurled, that of the stranger proving to be the blood-red flag of Great Britain, as had been expected.

A scene of great activity ensued on board the *Firefly*, the men anticipating an exciting scene, and Tom's valor infecting them, from the brawniest gunner down to the tiniest midshipmanite.

Under a full spread of canvas the *Firefly* drew rapidly upon her adversary, and as soon as the two vessels were in hailing distance, Captain Tom seized a speaking-trumpet and roared out:

"What ship is that? We are the *Firefly*, Captain Tom Drake!"

In an instant the answer came back, and Tom felt a strange thrill as he heard in tones that he could not fail to recognize, the words:

"The British cruiser *Terror*, Captain Harpy commanding. Surrender before we blow you out of the water, and sink every cursed man of you."

"Aha! we meet again, my beloved cousin," muttered Tom between his tightly closed lips. "We shall see who will do the blowing up, however."

Then, at a sign from him, the guns belched forth, and sent an iron rain hurtling through the air and across the *Terror's* decks.

It was answered gallantly enough, but being aimed at the hull of the *Firefly*, did no damage, the plated bulwarks shedding the heavy missiles as though they had been but rain-drops.

Again the *Firefly's* guns thundered forth their challenge—the *Terror* being seen to reel under the discharge like a wounded animal.

Shot after shot went crashing through mast, hull and rigging, and ere the *Firefly* had received more than a few trifling damages, such as the loss of a topmast or so and some of the lighter sails, the fate of the *Terror* was settled.

As the two vessels came together for the final struggle, the boarders on both ships being ready to leap upon the decks of the other, Reuben

Harpy sprang upon the quarter-deck, and waving a white flag, shouted:

"Tom Drake, will you give me one satisfaction?"

"What is that, you villain?" roared the brave young captain.

"That of taking your miserable life."

"You have tried that and failed. Now yield, or I'll work your own boastful threat upon yourself."

"Will you meet me hand-to-hand upon your own deck, and there decide who is the best man?"

"I should think that had already been proven," laughed Tom, scornfully.

"My vessel is but a rotten hulk and no match for yours. You cannot say I shrank from a contest which I knew could have but one end."

"That's true enough," murmured Ben Barnacle, aside; "but even a rat will turn and fight when cornered."

"Will you meet me face to face and hand to hand in fair combat on your own deck, and decide the fight?"

"The impudence of the fellow is sublime," said Harry Vere.

"Nevertheless, I will meet him," said Tom, firmly. "The fellow shows a pluck that I have never given him credit for."

"I told you that you did not know him," was Iron Arm's muttered comment.

"Will you promise me your ship if I vanquish you?" asked Reuben.

"Aye, and a dozen besides, with a free pardon to all your dirty crew. There are two conditions you must fulfill, though."

"What are they?"

"Haul down that ensign, which such a man as you even disgraces."

The colors were quickly lowered, and then Reuben asked:

"What is your other condition?"

"That I be allowed to fight in my own manner, being the challenged party."

"I care not how you fight, so long as I kill you. But I do not wish to see your cowardly face, with its appealing look, when I strike you dead at my feet."

"What can he mean?" asked Ben Barnacle of himself. "This is strange business surely."

The two vessels now touched, and Reuben stepped over the side, Tom coming down upon the main deck, saying:

"Let no man raise a hand. This is a fair contest between us two. If you mean false, Reuben Harpy, or attempt any treachery, I will kill you like a dog."

"I mean fair enough, cousin Tom Drake," said Reuben, his lip curling as he saw Tom flush at the name of cousin; "and to prove it, you may draw off so that my ship, if she blows up, may not harm yours."

There was danger of this, to be sure, the *Terror* being already on fire in more places than one, but Tom said bluntly:

"The affair will soon be over, and then we can save our vessel. Are you ready?"

"I am. What are your conditions?"

"That we fight a duel to the death, cutlasses for our weapons, and with our eyes blindfolded."

"Blindfolded!" repeated Reuben, his sinister face blanching to the hue of death in an instant.

"Yes. I told you I did not want to see your face as you begged for mercy!"

"This is madness!" muttered Ben Barnacle, "and yet I must not stop him."

"Be it so," said Reuben, doggedly. "At least we shall stand upon an equal footing. Where will you fight?"

"Here, on this deck, for I will not have my quarter sullied by your presence."

"A truce to your taunts. Produce your weapons."

A pair of heavy cutlasses, well-tempered and as sharp as razors, were produced and measured to show that they were of equal length, and this being proved, one was put into the hand of each party to this novel duel.

Their heads were bared and a thick handkerchief bound over their eyes, through which it was impossible for a single ray of light to penetrate.

They were then led to the waist, where there was ample room, and placed facing each other, their sword points just touching.

"Who will give the word?" asked Reuben, his face pale, but every nerve strung to its highest pitch.

"I will. When I say 'Ready,' strike, and may the devil help you, for I won't."

"I am prepared," said Reuben, quietly, putting himself on guard.

"READY!"

At the word both blades clashed together, so true had been the calculation of each combatant, and the strange duel at once proceeded, the clash-

ing blades giving out showers of sparks as each man sought to give the other the blow that would decide the battle once for all.

CHAPTER V.

A SINGULAR DUEL AND ITS ENDING—THE ENGAGEMENT.

CLASH!
Clash!

The stout blades met again and again, each man seeming to know by intuition where to strike in order to parry his opponent's blow, and yet neither could see the slightest object.

Clang!
Clang!

Steel rang to steel, every blow being delivered with all the force that could be put into it, strength counting for more than skill in this most singular encounter.

Ring!
Fing!
Clang!
Dang!

Now the blades rang together with the most perfect silvery sound, and they clashed together discordantly, as though sounding an alarm peal, the notes grating harshly upon the ear, "like sweet bells jingled out of tune."

Clash!
Clash!

Again and again the blades met midway between the combatants, who, quickly recovering, deal out slashing blows, one at the other, neither being able to see, but both being guided by the sense of hearing and the knowledge that neither had changed position since the fight began.

Not a word is spoken, all eyes being turned to that part of the deck where this unheard-of struggle is taking place, the spectators scarcely daring to breathe for fear they will disturb the balance which seems so well preserved between the two.

Now Tom begins to force the fight, and Reuben is obliged to retreat, a sharp cut upon the shoulder telling him that his antagonist has determined to bring the matter to an end.

The blades ring together again and again, but Reuben's arm is growing weak, and his blows are not delivered with that vigor and dash which at first characterized them.

He still fights doggedly enough, and rains showers of blows at the point where he supposes Tom's head to be, but with no other effect than causing the sparks to fly as thickly as rain-drops.

Tom suddenly gives an upward stroke and then brings his cutlass down in a sweeping manner, which carries everything before it.

Clang!

Reuben's weapon is twisted out of his grasp, and falls ringing and clattering to the deck, while the whole crowd give vent to their long pent-up feelings in lusty shouts or stifled groans, according as they are classed, as friends or foes to the young American captain.

This slashing blow of Tom's has laid open Reuben's hand all across the back, and the blood spurts up like a fountain, falling upon the deck in great clots.

Tom, hearing only Reuben's weapon fall, and knowing that he has not killed the miscreant, pauses, and lets his sword fall to his side, when suddenly Jerry Mizzen roars out:

"Avast there! A foul!"

Reuben, suddenly pulling the handkerchief from his eyes, snatches up the cutlass from the deck and makes a savage rush at Tom, being only prevented from accomplishing his evil design by Ben Barnacle lifting his ponderous fist and sending him sprawling across deck.

Picking himself up, Reuben springs upon the rail, and pointing to the offing, says with a wild laugh:

"You may escape your danger, but if you do it will be lucky for you, and I shall meet you again and finish my work now left undone."

Then he plunged from the rail into the sea; and as Harry Vere took the handkerchief from his young commander's eyes, the latter saw two war vessels flying British colors bearing down upon him, though still at a considerable distance.

"Aha, here is metal more attractive!" he cried, leaping upon his quarter-deck and waving his trusty sword.

"Put her off a bit and rig new topmasts!" he shouted. "Bear off from yon miserable wreck and prepare for a combat that shall do us credit."

"The *Terror* will soon blow up," said Harry Vere. "Aha, that fellow Harpy has reached her, and they have lowered a boat for him. They had better trust to that alone, for their vessel will soon be nothing but a mass of flames."

During the last few minutes the two late com-

batants had drifted to a considerable distance from each other, and it was well for the *Firefly* that they had, for the *Terror* was now nearly wrapped in flame, and might be blown up at any moment.

This was not the only danger to be apprehended, however, the presence of the two war-vessels indicating that there were other things to be feared.

Reuben had been aware all along of the vicinity of these two, and had purposely engaged Tom in the hope that if he were unable to subdue the daring boy, he would at least so cripple him as to render flight impossible.

To scud away was certainly the most advisable thing to do under the circumstances, but he never ran when there was any chance to fight, and he determined to stay and have it out with his foes, in spite of their size and better equipment.

The men flew to their work, and by the time the two Englishmen had come within range the repairs had all been made, and the saucy privateer was again ready for action.

There had been no one killed on the *Firefly* and but a few wounded, so that Dr. Shrike had had but little to do, which was a great disappointment to him.

He anticipated having plenty of work now, however, and he grinned and chuckled in a horrible manner as the shots began whizzing through the air, shrieking and screaming, falling into the sea with a hiss or striking with a dull thud against the plate armor of the hull.

In the midst of all the noise and confusion, a report louder than the rest was heard, and turning his eyes in the direction of the sound, Tom discovered that the magazine of his late antagonist had exploded, and that the *Terror* was no more, all that was left of her being a few scattered, blackened and burning fragments upon the face of the waters.

That Reuben and a part, if not all of his men, had escaped was very likely, as two boat loads had been seen to be picked up by the newcomers, and Tom did not doubt that the wretch would save his own life first of all, caring little whether the rest were saved or not.

The smoke from the explosion and from the fighting, which had already become brisk, was now so thick that the firing ceased until the heavy cloud should lift, and show the combatants the position of their plucky opponent.

When it did lift, what was their surprise to find that the *Firefly* had run in between them, being in such a position that she could rake them both and be herself comparatively safe, as any shots fired at her would necessarily endanger one or the other of her foes.

The Englishmen were higher above the water than she, and consequently a shot that would pass over her deck would strike the hull of either vessel, a fact which soon made itself apparent as the vessels opened fire upon her.

They immediately saw his mistake, and endeavored to swing around, both upon one side, a maneuver which Tom prevented by shooting away the head-sails of both, one after the other.

He then directed all his fire upon the *Monarch*, the larger of the two vessels, pouring broadside after broadside into her hull and rigging, and drawing up on her every minute.

"Prepare to repel boarders!" shouted the commander of the *Monarch*, as the *Firefly* came nearer; but a clever shot directed by Ben Barnacle carried away the boarding nettings as they were being rigged, and when the report of the next broadside had died away the two vessels came together with a shock that threw the *Monarch's* captain to the deck.

"Upon them!" yelled Tom, waving his sword. "One brave dash, my boys, and the ship is ours!"

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN TOM AND THE MIDSHIPMAN—ONCE MORE A ROVER.

With these words the young hero leaped at one bound from his own quarter-deck to that of the stranger, clearing the intervening space as lightly as a deer.

In a moment Harry Vere and a score of brave hearts were at his side, while further forward the grappnels had already been thrown, and the plucky seamen, scrambling up the side, poured in a perfect swarm upon the enemy's deck, driving everything before them.

The blood-red flag still floated triumphantly over all, but a daring young midshipman, who had made up his mind to do one brave act, if he died for it, climbed up the rigging like a cat and tore it from its place.

A shout arose from the deck as the Americans saw what had happened, and the commander of the other vessel grew disheartened as he saw the supposed surrender of the *Monarch*.

One of the marines on deck, raising his piece, fired at the daring boy as he was preparing to descend, and hitting him in the shoulder, caused him to lose his hold, and fall heavily to the deck, with the bunting in his hand.

With a roar like that of a bull, the gigantic Iron Arm sprang upon the offender, and with one blow of his naked fist split the miscreant's skull in twain, and stretched him lifeless at his feet.

Then, snatching up the flag, he tore it into fragments, and hurling them from him, yelled fiercely: "Thus would I serve all who fight under the tyrant's flag! Rally, my brave lads, and drive these fiends into the sea!"

"Now yield, or be cleft from head to heel!" cried Tom at that moment, rushing upon the captain, and whirling the sword from his grasp.

"You have conquered," said the captain, bowing humbly and removing his chapeau, "and I trust to your generosity. In all my life I have never met a younger or more determined foe than yourself."

The second vessel, fancying that the first had been overpowered, now began to move off; as, being smaller, her commander felt that there was no chance for him with such a determined adversary as Tom had proved himself to be.

The *Monarch's* men, seeing this, felt that they were abandoned, and that it was useless to farther prolong a fight which could have but one end.

"Poor boy," said Tom, as he bent over the form of the little midshipman, now stretched out upon a grating, his head upon Jerry Mizzen's lap. "You risked your life for me, and how can I thank you?"

"Has she surrendered, captain?" asked the lad, faintly, his breath coming hard.

"Yes, my lad, and to you I owe it."

"You really think so?" asked the boy, eagerly, the color mounting to his pale cheeks.

"I do, indeed."

"Thank you, sir. I am so glad I did something. Will you tell my father that I made them surrender? He always said I was good for nothing because I was so little."

"I know him," muttered Bob Hanlon. "He was always nagging the poor lad."

"No one is good for nothing, my boy," said Captain Tom, taking the poor little fellow's hand and smoothing his fair hair back from his forehead, upon which the death-damp had already begun to gather.

"And you will tell him, sir?"

"It shall be heard of, my lad, never fear. You have done bravely, and I trust that you will live to do many brave deeds in your country's cause."

"No, no, I shall do no more, captain. This is my first and last. Don't let go of my hand, I want to feel your grasp. It will not be for long."

"Wait a moment, my lad," said Tom, withdrawing his hand, and then the meaning of the action was apparent.

Unfastening one of the decorations he wore upon his breast, he pinned it to the little fellow's jacket, and said:

"There, my boy, let all the world know that Captain Tom Drake can appreciate bravery, wherever he sees it, whether in an humble midshipmite, or in the proudest noble of the land."

"Thank you, captain," murmured the lad, a smile crossing his young face. "Now I can die happy. Good-bye, all, and do not forget to tell them that I was good for something, after all."

"It's only a pity that there wasn't more like you," muttered poor Jerry, letting an unbidden tear fall upon the white forehead of the brave lad who lay in his arms.

It was all over in a moment, and Jerry, placing the lifeless form upon the grating, spread a handkerchief over the face, and turned sadly away to hide the tears which came to his eyes in spite of him.

"It is not to be wondered at that your men serve you with such faithfulness, Captain Drake," said the late captain of the *Monarch*, now approaching; "for after the scene I have just witnessed I cannot imagine their doing otherwise than loving and respecting you."

Indeed it was just such little deeds like that which has just been recorded more than his daring ones which made Captain Tom's popularity, and which endeared him to the hearts of all who came in contact with him.

"I have the interests of all under my command at heart, from the highest to the lowest," replied the young captain; "and I treat all with equal measure, for our glorious Declaration of Independence tells us that all men are born free and equal."

"With such foes as you I fear that we will find such is not the case," replied the other, with a light laugh. "I have to own you my superior at all events."

"Not I, but my ship," replied Tom, and then added:

"I shall be pleased to offer you the hospitality of my cabin until I make some disposition of your vessel."

The offer was accepted as graciously as it was given, and the ship was then formally taken possession of, the other vessel being now so far away as to make a chase impracticable, particularly with the *Monarch* to look after.

Reuben Harpy was not to be found, and finally one of the sailors of the *Terror*, that had been picked up by the *Monarch*, said that he had gone aboard the other vessel.

The two ships now sailed in company, Harry Vere commanding the *Monarch* with a small crew, a part of Tom's men having already gone off in the captured merchantman under command of the third lieutenant.

The youthful captain did not care, therefore, to part company with any more of his men, and he resolved to take in his prize himself, and then run out again with a full crew and follow the main body of the fleet.

He much preferred privateering, as in that manner he could harass his old enemies, the British, more effectually than if he had been deputed to stated places and been obliged to go according to orders always.

The wind being favorable, Tom made up his mind not to do any more cruising until he had carried home his prize, and crowding all sail on both vessels he turned his course towards the States and bowled along at a lively rate, meeting nothing for three days.

Then he espied a large frigate, and running up the colors of his country was gratified to see the stranger reply by showing the British ensign.

Then a lively chase began, for Tom preferred stratagem to fight just then, and as a stern chase is always a long one, he found the Briton still in pursuit when morning broke the next day.

The wind had freshened with the rising sun and all that morning he ran before it, Harry Vere keeping the *Monarch* pretty well up with the *Firefly*, Tom having given him particular orders not to lose sight of him.

All that day the chase lasted, but just before night the young captain caught sight of two vessels, sailing in company, whom he knew to be American cruisers by their build and rigging.

The Englishman turned tail at this, and before long Tom hailed the new-comers, finding them to be what he had supposed them.

They gave chase to the enemy while he continued on his way, and in course of time reached the States with his prize, which was at once made over into an American war vessel and rechristened the *Union*, the captain and crew being kept for exchange.

Tom now learned of the renowned engagement between the *Constitution* and the *Guerriere*, and his heart beat more proudly as he realized that the British had at last recognized the importance of a navy they had before scoffed at, and he determined to follow the illustrious example set him by his brave countrymen, and follow up the course he had already begun.

After refitting, the *Firefly* set sail for the West Indies once more, his main object being to find Reuben, and at the same time make war upon the British commerce, for with that weakened the naval marine would suffer in consequence, and Tom was ready to take any means to annoy his ancient enemies.

In the Caribbean Sea he met and captured a small vessel carrying ten guns, which he sent home, and then, clapping on all sail, sped right across the ocean, the roving spirit once more animating him, and the spirit of adventure prevailing over every emotion except the love of country.

One day while off the African coast, a strange vessel hove in sight, and when she came near, ran up the black flag, the true sign of a pirate all over the world.

"I should know that vessel again," muttered Ben, who was standing by the rail gazing seaward. "It is the mystic ship of the Death Pirate himself!"

"Then we meet again," said Tom, who had heard the words, "and this time I mean to see that devil's face."

"Take care," said Ben. "You remember that none have attempted that and lived."

"I will disprove that legend and drive this scourge from the sea, so prepare at once for a fight such as we have never yet seen!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEATH'S HEAD PIRATE ONCE MORE.

It was evident that the Death Pirate was not as eager for a fight as his old enemy, Captain Tom

Drake, for while he made all preparations for a desperate struggle, he got up additional sail and stood off, as if to avoid one if possible.

"The villain means to evade me," said Tom, "but this time he shall not escape."

"This is a dangerous and treacherous coast, and you had better have a care how you go too near it," cautioned Ben Barnacle.

"What do you know of it?"

"I have been here, and know it to be full of shoals and sunken rocks, intricate passages and dangerous eddies, though if one had a thorough knowledge of it, there are many places he could effectually hide himself, secure from the most vigilant search."

"You seem to have an intimate acquaintance with this villain," said Tom, presently, "and, if I mistake not, you know him well."

Ben's face turned to the hue of death, and he seemed greatly agitated, but recovering his composure with an effort, he replied:

"You have but fancied this. How should I have an acquaintance with such a wretch. Do they not say that no one has ever seen his face?"

"Oh, yes; they tell all sorts of superstitious stories, which foolish sailors are silly enough to believe, but I do not credit them for one, and I am determined to make this coward show his ugly face at last."

"If you can get aboard his ship, and that seems unlikely with this fog that is beginning to rise?"

The sun had suddenly been obscured, and a dense fog was now rising from the water, which threatened to shut out the pirate vessel from sight, and render the dangers of the coast greater than before.

"It is the ship that makes the mist," observed Bob Hauler, gravely. "See the white cloud that is gathering about it at this moment."

"The fellow is the devil himself," added Jerry; "and it will bring us no good to follow him. We shall only be wrecked."

"I have that which will scatter this mist, captain," said Iron Arm, patting one of the largest guns, "and if you say so; I'll do it?"

"By all means," answered Tom, quietly.

The gunner had evidently been expecting this answer, for in one minute he sent a shower of grape whizzing through the air and striking the sea just behind the pirate ship.

The mist was considerably disturbed by the rush of air, and lifted for a few moments, revealing the crested waves for some considerable distance.

Then the pirate was observed enveloped in a blood-red cloud of mist and smoke, which thickened every instant, and threatened to hide the ship from sight.

"Didn't I tell you he was the devil?" said Jerry, while the men began to murmur and show signs of disquietude, the general feeling being one of awe, the expressions that were dropped showing that they strongly objected to fighting against such a foe.

"Give him a broadside!" cried Captain Tom, quickly noticing these signs. "If he be the devil I have a sure means of exorcising him. To your posts all! Boatswain, beat to quarters!"

The drum rolled out its stirring call, and the men, inspired by its notes, sprang to their places and awaited the next orders. Tom's confidence in his vessel and crew imparting itself to him in a moment.

As the *Firefly* drew nearer to the pirate she poured in a broadside, and, for an instant, the vessel was hidden from sight by the dense smoke.

Then it lifted, and Tom was preparing to give the mystic ship another dose when Harry Vere, touching him upon the arm, said:

"What in Heaven's name does this mean? Where is the ship?"

Well might he ask, for not the first sign of her was to be seen.

She had disappeared totally from sight, and yet there were no signs of her having sunk or been blown up.

To complete the mystery, the fog had again lifted, leaving the sea visible once more, so that an object could be seen for a distance of five miles at least, and the mystic ship had not been nearly so far away as that when last seen.

"She can't have been swallowed up," said Harry Vere, "and there is no place where she can hide, as I can see, in all the coast."

"She is hiding for all that."

"But how can she hide with this unbroken line of cliff running along for miles?"

"It is not unbroken," spoke up Ben. "There is a break, so made, however, that until you approach within five fathoms you cannot see it."

"You know the passage?" cried Tom, eagerly.

"Yes, but I would not dare to take the ship in."

"Then we will anchor here and wait for this villain to come out. There is no other way of exit?"

"None that I know of."

"Then we will wait for him," said Tom, quietly. "Stand off a bit so as to be out of range of any shots he may fire from his batteries, and then drop anchor."

This was done accordingly, and the *Firefly* rested calmly upon the waters as though she had been on a mere pleasure trip instead of seeking the destruction of one of the veriest scourges of the sea that had ever been known.

Tom had his plans, but he said nothing until night, when, calling Harry Vere aside, he said:

"I leave the ship in your charge. I am going to enter the lair of the pirate!"

"You are mad!"

"Not so. I shall take a boat with a crew armed to the teeth, and composed only of men whom I can trust, and I shall not return until I have accomplished what I intend."

"But the danger, the rashness, the madness of such an under—"

"Say no more, Harry, for I am resolved, and nothing can swerve me from my purpose. If I do not return, take command of the ship."

"And the men that you propose taking with you?"

"Ben Barnacle, Iron Arm, Jerry and Bob, and half a dozen others. I shall have the long-boat, which will accommodate all that I want."

"Have you spoken to the rest?"

"I have given Ben orders to pick me out a crew, mentioning those whom I would prefer."

"What does Ben say to the project? I know you consult him on a good many matters, even though you are his superior."

"Only in rank, however. He approves of it, although he acknowledges that it is a dangerous undertaking."

"And particularly so when you see the probability of the pirates expecting and being prepared for just such a visit."

"So much the better then, for I shall be sure of a welcome, and we can the sooner get to work," replied the undaunted young fellow.

"Of a truth, you have a strange way of looking at the matter," said the other. "Most men would desire that their coming should be unknown."

"I seek danger, always, instead of shrinking from it."

"By my faith, I know that well, as do our enemies. Well, all I can say is that I wish you all success in your rash attempt."

At that moment Ben approached and announced that the boat was all ready to be lowered and that the men were eager to depart.

The night was extremely dark, the moon not having yet arisen, and as the boat pushed off from the ship, she was soon lost to sight in the surrounding gloom.

The oars were muffled, and as no sound was given out to show the position of the boat, it seemed as if she was completely lost, the moment she disappeared from view.

The giant boatswain directed her course, and in about twenty minutes from the time of leaving the ship, the boat glided in between the cliffs and made its way silently along the passage, the pirate ship being nowhere in sight.

"Could they have escaped by another passage while we have been waiting outside?" whispered the young captain to Ben.

"Impossible. Lie on your oars a bit," he whispered to the rowers. "Aha, starboard there, or we will collide."

At that instant the pirate vessel was seen close to, and but for Ben's sudden order the boat would have run into her.

Rowing cautiously and silently past the silent hull, on board of which there were no signs of life, the boatswain headed his craft toward a point of rocks where a dim glimmer of light could be seen, as if coming from the interior of some cavernous recess, fit only for the abode of such lawless men as the Death Pirate and his outlaw crew.

Presently the prow of the boat grated on the sand, and Ben, springing out, drew it up and made it secure, the men quickly following, at a signal from Tom.

"Remain within call," said the young man, and then, entirely alone and shrouded in the blackest of darkness, Captain Tom advanced fearlessly into the very jaws of the lion, so to speak, undaunted and unshrinking, while the sailors waited behind with the utmost apprehension, but in perfect silence.

"God save him," muttered Ben, "for he is now alone in the lair of the wolf."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCARRED HAND—IN THE CAVE OF DEATH.

PISTOLS in hand, Tom advanced toward the faint glimmer of light which he now perceived to come from a small oil-lamp placed in a niche hollowed out of the rock, and evidently placed

there as a guide to any one penetrating into these silent recesses.

When he reached this spot he saw a vaulted passage leading deeper into the cavern, there being a heavy oaken door at the extreme end, which he could just make out by the glimmer of a second lamp placed against the wall.

That this door led to the pirate's lair he had no doubt, and making his way boldly along the rough passage he at last reached it, finding it closed but not barred.

Swinging it open with considerable difficulty, for the hinges were rusty and clogged with the dust of years, he found himself in a large circular hall with a vaulted ceiling, stone benches arranged about a table of the same material, in the center, and other benches along the sides of the place, which was cold and damp, the moisture dripping from the walls, and the floors wet and slimy.

Over the central table was suspended half a dozen swinging lamps, which served to dispel the gloom somewhat, but did not fairly drive away the darkness, the further portions of the room being still in deep shade.

As Tom stood there contemplating the scene a small door in the wall, concealed until then, opened and admitted a figure wrapped in a heavy black cloak.

Throwing aside this the figure revealed itself, clothed in a rich uniform of black and gold, a wide sash of red silk, in which was thrust a number of pistols and daggers, being fastened about his waist, and over his face a hideous mask representing a grinning skull.

"It is you at last, then," said Tom. "You see I have not feared to seek you in your own retreat."

Motioning to a seat at one end of the table, the pirate, for so he seemed to be, took a place at the other end, and as Tom sat down, rang a small bell placed near his hand.

Presently a black slave, gorgeously attired, entered, bearing a silver tray, upon which were two massive silver goblets filled with choice wine, the perfume of which produced the most delightful sensation upon the nostrils.

The attendant placed the wine upon the table close to Tom, and as he did so, the latter suddenly started up in surprise.

Across the back of the black's right hand was a deep scar running diagonally from the lower joint of the first finger, down to the wrist bone, the flesh being ridged, and the veins swollen far beyond their proper size.

"There is but one man that bears a scar like that!" cried Tom, and in an instant he had dashed half the contents of his goblet over the scarred hand, at the same time drawing his faithful sword.

In a moment the black hue of the hand disappeared, its true color being at once revealed.

It was as white as Tom's own hand, and with a fierce cry he seized it in his own hand, and dashing the remainder of the wine into the man's face, cried loudly:

"So I was not mistaken, and it is Reuben Harpy that I behold. How you came here I know not, neither do I care, but *to-night you die!*"

"Not so fast, fair cousin," answered Reuben, for it was he indeed, in the guise of a black slave. "Despite the beauty mark your hand put upon it, my hand has not lost its strength, as you shall see."

Then, breaking away from the grasp of Captain Tom, who was about to seize him by the throat, Reuben drew a dagger from his belt and rushed fiercely at his former antagonist.

The pirate chief had suddenly disappeared, no one could tell whither, but Tom cared not for the present, his first aim being to punish the villain who now stood before him.

"It is your master, and not you, whom I sought," he said, scornfully, as he beat down Reuben's dagger with one blow of his sword, "but since you wish it, I will give you what you deserve, and then attend to your betters."

So saying he pressed the villain hard, and was about to deal the miscreant a blow which would have forever ended his base career, when he heard a sudden click, and felt the floor giving way beneath him.

He attempted to spring forward, but the surprise was too sudden, and he felt himself being hurled downward at great speed, the last thing he saw being the sinister face of Reuben glaring at him with a look of the most deadly hate, while a mocking laugh rang out and echoed again and again through the vaulted room as he disappeared from sight.

It seemed an age before Tom's wild flight came to an end, but it did at last and he struck heavily upon his side. Not upon the rocks, but upon a mass of something which yielded and greatly broke his fall, so that although he was stunned he was not seriously injured.

After a while he rose and found that a partial light stole into the place, though where it came from he could not determine.

By this light he saw that he had fallen upon a large quantity of bales of silk and other valuable goods, the floor being thickly strewn with them.

Judging that he was in the pirate's store-house, and that there must be a passage leading to the water, for that the goods must have been carried in from some outer cavern and not thrown down from above, was apparent. Tom picked himself up, and soon reached a further apartment different in character from the first, but with no visible means of exit.

As he advanced he heard a dull sound behind him, and turning his head saw that a heavy door had been swung to which cut off his retreat.

Advancing further into the semi-darkness of the place, however, he became conscious of the presence of some dread thing, he could not tell what, and his hand sought his sword-belt mechanically.

Suddenly he saw more plainly what it was that had caused the feeling of awe, and he turned pale, not with fright, but with very horror.

A human skeleton, white and gleaming, unfolded in the coils of a huge and venomous serpent.

No wonder that our hero turned pale, for there was not one alone of those terrible visions, but a dozen lying in different portions of this death cave.

From the sightless eyes of the grinning skulls protruded the poisonous fangs of green and slimy snakes, while between the ribs and over the fleshless bones glided and crawled other venomous creatures, disturbed by the footsteps of the new-comer.

In one corner lay a pile of human bones, thrown promiscuously about, and upon these the green mold of decay had fallen, while toads, lizards, spiders, fat and venomous; slimy serpents and vampire bats, crawled, hovered and congregated about, as if attracted by the noisome pile.

The place was a very pest-house, and Tom drew back with an involuntary shudder, his sword leaping from its scabbard as a huge serpent, longer than himself, glided towards him, and raised its bejeweled but deadly eyes to the level of his breast.

With one sweep of his keen blade he struck the vile creature's head from its body, and advanced breathlessly toward the decaying heap of bones, his sharp eyes having detected a door just behind.

The place was suddenly filled with an unearthly green light, which threw an added mystery over all, and at the same time the hissing of the furious reptiles increased, the slimy creatures advancing upon him from all sides.

"What sort of death-trap is this?" muttered Tom. "The grave can be no worse. I must escape, or I shall be stung to death."

Then of a sudden the door before him opened, revealing a beautiful and exquisitely furnished room behind, but directly in front arose the sinuous forms of two huge serpents chained to the posts, and barring his progress.

"You mock me," cried Tom, "but I will escape despite all these terrors," and with drawn sword and flashing eye he strode valiantly forward, while all about him crept the slimy, hissing reptiles, as if ready to add his bones to the ghastly pile upon which they had already fattened.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE SURPRISES THAN ONE.

INTO the very midst of death strode the fearless young commander, but nothing daunted by his danger, the object for which he had entered the pirate's lair being still unattained.

To accomplish that he would brave any peril, and advancing therefore upon the hissing serpents as though they had been mere worms, he slashed right and left with his well-tempered blade, and at every stroke the severed heads of the disgusting things fell at his feet.

Crushing them beneath his heels, he dashed upon the two monstrous reptiles chained in front of the doorway, and looking them fiercely in the eyes, raised his sword for the blow which should decide, once for all, who was to be the winner in this strange combat.

Taking one stride, Captain Tom gave a sweeping downward blow, striking the monster's neck at an acute angle just below the head.

Then he sprang back with the agility of a cat, as the second serpent threw himself forward.

The blood spurted out in a crimson stream, the huge monster still writhing in agony, although his severed head lay upon the stone floor in a pool of blood.

Like a ray of light Tom's trusty sword flashed

in air, and in an instant it had cleaved through bone, muscle, and solid flesh, and the remaining python lay dead before him.

With his sword still drawn Tom leaped through the doorway as the iron portals swung behind him with a terrible clang, his heel just clearing the heavy gates as they closed together with a ponderous sound.

The apartment into which Tom had made his way in so daring a fashion was furnished with the utmost elegance and sumptuousness, the eye being fairly dazzled with the magnificence to be seen upon all sides.

The walls were completely covered with rich hangings of amber satin, while upon the floor were numerous large rugs in heavy velvet, costly furs and other materials, the foot sinking noiselessly into the rich masses, giving one the feeling of treading on air.

Gorgeously covered lounges and divans were scattered about the place, the very atmosphere of which was redolent of luxury, all the ornaments being of the richest and costliest description and gleaned from all parts of the world.

The tanned skinned of a royal Bengal tiger was thrown carelessly over one corner of an antique marble buffet that could only have come from Italy, while near it stood a superb Japanese screen, fairly blazing with gold, placed upon a rug of Russian sables.

In one corner a silver fountain from Constantinople sent up a tiny spray of perfumed water, which imparted a delicious fragrance to the air, while a number of swinging lamps gave forth light and a soothing perfume at one and the same time.

Jewels and works of art, bronzes and exquisite pictures, carved ivory, ebony, silver and gold appeared on every hand, and nothing rare, costly or marvelous seemed to be wanting.

It was a very paradise of luxury in fact and Tom could but stand and gaze in wonder, and amazement at the beautiful scene, of which he had before but caught a mere glimpse.

Opposite the door of the entrance, but a little to one side, was a massive mirror, twelve feet in height, which reflected everything in the room, and made it seem at first sight as if there were another apartment beyond, equally as gorgeous in its fittings as the first.

While Tom stood there, lost in admiration at the wonders he beheld, the hangings upon one side of the mirror were suddenly thrown aside, and a man of tall, commanding presence appeared.

He was most richly dressed, a gold-hilted sword hanging by his side, and a broad scarlet sash about his waist, above which appeared the butts of two large pistols.

There was no mistaking the man, for concealing his face was a hideous mask, representing a grinning skull, though from the sockets a pair of eyes, deep, dark, and intensely piercing, could be seen darting forth a baleful glance.

"You have behaved most gallantly, rash boy," said the pirate, for it could be no other than he who stood before the young captain. "Had you been less brave, your rashness in intruding upon me would have cost you your life."

"I had a purpose in coming here," answered Tom, fiercely, "and well do you know what it is. I mean to blow your infernal nest of thieves to the four winds of heaven and—see your face!"

"Rash intruder, do you not know that the sight would be your death? So runs the legend, that he who looks upon the face of the Death Pirate dies the most horrible death that can be conceived of."

"A truce to such nonsense!" cried Tom. "Death at your hands is not meant for such as me, and you cannot frighten me with your old women's tales. Draw, villain, for I have sworn to rid the earth of your infamous presence."

"Suppose I do not choose to fight with you?" said the other, in a contemptuous tone.

"Then I will save the executioner a job, and slay you where you stand, and then, whether you will or no, I will see your face and disprove all your vain boasting."

"Dare you look upon the face of the Death Pirate, presumptuous fool?" asked the other, stepping in front of the mirror which reflected the whole of his commanding figure.

"I dare, and I will!" cried Tom, striding forward, his sword drawn, his eyes flashing, his lips firmly set, and every muscle strained to its utmost.

"Back!" cried the Death Pirate, suddenly raising his hands to his face "Behold!"

Then he swiftly removed the mask, while an exclamation of horror broke from Tom's lips.

Instead of the man's face he beheld absolutely nothing!

The Death Pirate stood before him without a head!

It could be no trick, for there in the mirror behind him was reflected the man's body and shoulders, lacking any trace of a head, the neck having evidently been severed at the junction of the spine.

Horror of horrors! the man was not human, but was a devil, a spirit, a creature of the imagination!

"I will probe this mystery if I die the next minute!" cried Tom, making a rush at the inexplicable being before him.

In an instant the man disappeared *through the mirror*, and Tom saw his own reflection only!

Was the man then a spirit indeed, that he could thus pass through a solid substance and disappear from sight like a puff of smoke?

Suspecting some legerdemain, and resolving to sift the mystery to the bottom, Tom sprang forward and leaped upon a ledge of pure white marble at the base of the mirror, at the same time striking at the latter with his sword.

In an instant he felt the marble giving way beneath him, and before he could recover himself he was precipitated down some dark and slimy passage, and fell upon the rocks in utter darkness.

He was somewhat stunned, though perfectly conscious, and seeing a light, dim and uncertain, ahead of him, he strode rapidly forward, and presently found himself upon a rocky ledge overlooking the pirates' harbor, his own vessel being in plain sight at the further end of the passage. Wondering why she should have ventured into the place contrary to his orders, he was about to look for a means of descending to the water's edge, when in an instant a dozen ruffians, dressed in pirates' jackets and caps, rushed upon him from behind a jutting rock.

He had lost his sword in the sudden descent from the pirates' lair, and he had no other means of defending himself against the ruffians who began to swarm upon him.

Felling the foremost villains to the ground with his strong fists, he cleared a passage for himself, and then plunged boldly into the water.

When he arose, he struck out vigorously for his ship, which he soon reached and hailed, receiving an answer instantly, a rope being thrown to him by some one on deck.

He was drawn up, and then beheld no less a person than Ben Barnacle, whom he had left in the boat, while he ventured alone into the lair of the Death Pirate!

CHAPTER X.

A FRUITLESS CHASE.

"WHAT does this mean?" demanded Tom, in surprise. "You were to remain until I returned."

"But you didn't return, and fearing mischief, I pulled back to the ship, resolving to tear the whole infernal den about the villains' ears."

"But the ship?"

"Mr. Vere brought her in, and was going to bombard the place. Besides that, there's an English cruiser hanging about outside, and we thought we wouldn't let her see us just yet."

"An English cruiser? Let us chase the villain! This carrion here"—beckoning toward the pirate stronghold—"can await my pleasure upon some other occasion. Harry, take command of the *Firefly* while I change my wet clothes. Don't spare powder and shot when you meet that fellow outside."

"I will not, I assure you; and I will give him such a peppering as will knock some sense into his stupid head."

"That's right; give him all the thunder and brimstone he wants," and with that Tom descended to his cabin, in order to put on dry garments.

Vere proved an able commander, and taking the *Firefly* out of the passage, headed at once for the strange cruiser, and sent a shot whizzing toward her.

The other, instead of answering, spread all sail and hastened away as fast as she could go, Harry pursuing her with a dogged determination, which promised to prove troublesome to the enemy.

When Tom came up he took in the situation, and said, with a smile:

"At your old tricks again, eh, Harry? You seem bound not to let these fellows rest."

"And no more will I, until I have swept them all from the sea. When I think of the persecutions I have suffered through the villains that owe allegiance to that blood-red flag, it makes my very blood boil."

"I fear that yonder fellow is too fast for even the nimble *Firefly* to catch. He shows us a lively pair of heels, and seems to be already gaining upon us. I never saw one of the enemy's vessels less disposed for a fight. However, a stern chase is a long one, and I have no objection to a trial

of speed. Clap on more sail and wet them thoroughly."

This maneuver had the effect of increasing the *Firefly's* speed; but as the stranger appeared to have done something of the same sort, the distance between the two vessels was not materially altered.

Presently Ben Barnacle said with a grave look upon his bronzed face:

"There is a reason for their not wishing to fight us at this time, and I fear that some trap is being laid for us."

"What trap?"

"She may have friends further on, and be leading you thence in order that you may fall an easier victim. I would advise you to stand off, and let the fellow go his own way."

Tom drew himself up proudly, his chest heaving, his eye flashing, and the color mounting into his cheeks, and said in that old, fearless tone of his, which they all knew so well:

"Give up a fight, because, perchance, I shall have odds to contend against? Never!"

"She must have more wind than us, sir, or she has got up more sail," said Jerry, "for she's drawing away from us as though she had the fiend at her heels."

"So she is," muttered Tom. "If she is so anxious to get away, it would hardly seem probable that she was leading us into a trap."

"What other motive can she have?" asked Ben.

"Perhaps I can explain," said Iron Arm, coming up and respectfully touching his hat.

"Proceed."

"When the boat returned to the ship I remained on shore, and just before it came for me again, after the ship had entered the channel, I saw a single rocket sent up from the frigate above my head."

"The cruiser sent that up," interposed Ben.

No. I thought so at first, but I afterwards saw another, and that, probably, did come from the cruiser. A short time elapsed after this, and then a figure suddenly appeared before me, and running along the rocks sprang into a boat which I had not before noticed, and sped away through a secret passage, which I do not believe even Ben knew of.

"I caught one glimpse of the man's face as he fled away, and as I hope for mercy, it was that evil-minded villain, Reuben Harpy himself."

"The exciting events which succeeded, your appearance and our own sailing, drove the incident from my mind, but just now, hearing you discuss the matter, I remembered it."

"Well," asked Tom, seeing that the man had something more to say, "what inference do you draw from this?"

"That Reuben Harpy is on that vessel, that he has reported you as being the pirate ship, and, probably, told Tom some terrible tale about it, and that is why she is flying away so fast."

"Yes, and—"

"How Reuben Harpy came to be here I can't say, but I can swear that it was he."

"It was, indeed, for I saw him myself. What you say seems reasonable, and that is all the more excuse for my pursuing their vessel, and bringing the wretch to an account."

Ben saw that it would be of no further use to try and dissuade Tom from his purpose, and he went away, evidently greatly chagrined.

The chase continued through the night, the strange vessel increasing her lead, however, and when morning dawned she was but a speck in the distance.

"I did not think that any vessel could escape us so easily," observed Tom, "and particularly one of our own size, but fear has lent them wings, undoubtedly, and that is the only explanation I can offer."

"We've scared 'em away, at all events," said Bob Hauler to Jerry Mizzen, the two cronies being seated forward upon the rail with their feet hanging inside. "I don't believe you ever run faster than that, Jerry, when King George's men were after you."

"Or you, when you was running after Jennie Cripps, the bumboat woman. You'd like to court that gal, but her limbs was too fleet for you."

This allusion to an old love affair of Bob's caused both to laugh heartily, and Dr. Shrike, who happened to be passing, grinned and remarked, in his tantalizing way:

"You'll laugh now, but when you get under my hands, with an arm and, perhaps, a leg to take off, you won't be so merry."

"Get along, old Sawbones," answered Jerry, "or I'll tie you up in a double-bow knot and leave you to yourself to get out of the scrape."

"There might have been some fun if yonder runaway had shown fight," muttered Shrike, "but now I'll have to practice on Jacob just to keep my hand in."

"You might teach him a lesson in amputation," said Jerry, with a leer. "Let him see how nicely he can take your head off and sew it on again. That's a trick that he would give a month's pay to learn to do well. He can try it on just as well as not."

"Bah! if your head were off, it wouldn't matter, for the first pig we killed could supply you with one as good as what you've got now, and you'd never know the difference."

"Nor you, with a sheep's head on your shoulders, old blood-letter! But I say, Bob," he continued, as the surgeon moved away, making wry faces at his tormentor, "what do you think the captain intends doing?"

"Give it up, Jerry; but I wish we were on land again, and had a good chance for adventure."

This wish was to be gratified sooner than the honest fellow suspected, as we shall see by what follows.

CHAPTER XI.

A MESSAGE FROM LOVED ONES.

THE next day the captain and crew of the *Firefly* met with a singular adventure.

The vessel was sailing along under a moderate stretch of canvas, when the man aloft descried something floating in the water.

It was at some distance, but appeared to be a boat, containing two persons.

He made his discovery known, and Captain Tom, ascending the rigging, scanned the horizon with his glass.

"It is a boat, indeed," he cried, "and in a sinking condition. Whoever the occupants may be," he said, after a pause, "the danger of being drowned is not the only peril to which they are exposed. Those sharp-pointed objects, floating upon the water near them, can be nothing less than a school of sharks, waiting for their prey."

A nearer approach to the floating object showed that such was indeed the case, the sharks seeming to know that the boat could not long survive the injuries it had received, and that sooner or later its occupants must fall victims to their rapacious appetites.

As it was, the boat was half full of water, and to attempt to bale it seemed of no use, as the water came in faster than it could be thrown out.

There were two persons in the boat, one an old white-haired man and the other a boy of sixteen or seventeen years, delicate for his years, and refined and intelligent in his bearing.

They seemed overjoyed when they saw the ship approaching, although they did not cease their hopeless task of attempting to keep the boat afloat awhile longer.

Indeed, it was absolutely necessary that they should, for were it to sink before the *Firefly* could lower a boat, nothing under heaven could save them from the rapacious monsters which swam within a yard of the gunwale.

Indeed they swam closer than that, for every now and then one would glide so near the boat that the boy could have touched him with his hand.

At such times he would start back in great apprehension, the old man striking the moster with a broken oar, thus momentarily frightening the hideous creatures away and securing a brief respite.

It was evident, however, that both his strength and that of the boy were nearly exhausted, and that the wretched boat itself must soon give out and, whirling around, sink to the bottom.

"Courage, my lad," called Tom, through his speaking-trumpet, as a boat was lowered. "Bear up yet a little while, and you shall be saved, I promise you."

The rescuers were none too soon with their aid, for as they came within a boat's length of the little craft, the boy uttered a heart-rending scream.

One of the sharks, emboldened by his rapacity, no doubt, turned over on his back and threw himself bodily into the boat.

His weight caused it to tip frightfully and to let the water in by the gallon, thus hastening the catastrophe which all were so eager to avert.

More than this, his tail, as it swept to and fro, struck the old man and threw him into the water.

There was a rush, a whitening of the waves as they were lashed into foam by the struggles of the sharks to reach the victim first, and then a crimson flood told too well how the poor fellow had perished.

"Pull ahead with all your might!" cried Iron Arm, who headed the boat, and with a crash its bow came against the other boat amidships, staving it into a hundred pieces.

Quick as a flash, as it sped by, right over the other, the stalwart fellow seized the trembling

boy in his arms, drew him into the boat, and placed him gently in the bottom.

"Poor fellow, he has fainted," he said. "No wonder for it; the sight of that poor man's fate was enough to make any one grow sick at heart."

He started to loosen the boy's collar and open his shirt, that he might breathe more freely, when suddenly he gave utterance to an exclamation of blank amazement.

"Heaven save us! It's no boy at all, but a woman."

"A woman?" cried all hands.

"Aye, a woman, and a devilish pretty one too, now that I come to look at her. This is the strangest thing I ever heard of."

The girl, for such she was, recovered at this moment, and said, the crimson blood mantling her fair cheeks and pale temples:

"You will not betray me! I am indeed a woman, and it was to escape a villain that I assumed this garb."

"Betray you!" said Iron Arm. "You don't know me. Why, I would do anything for a pretty woman, and most of all one in distress."

"Thank you, sir. I knew you had a kind heart. Now that my poor old friend is dead, there is no one whom I could trust if you should prove false."

"Yes, there is," cried the other, pointing to the ship; "there is our noble captain, Privateer Tom."

"The gallant Captain Tom Drake," said Jerry; "the terror of the British, the pride of the patriots, and the darling of every lady in the land, God bless him!"

"Captain Tom Drake!" said the girl, in surprise. "Then I am fortunate, indeed, in having met you, for I can warn him against one of his bitterest enemies."

"You can tell him the whole story in person, then," replied the other, as the boat came alongside; "for there he is on the quarter-deck, looking handsomer than ever. You mustn't try to fascinate him, however, for he is married to the sweetest and prettiest girl in America."

The girl blushed, and answered, sadly:

"I fear that I have lost the power of fascinating anybody, for sorrow and misfortune have deprived me of my former beauty, and placed a burden upon my heart which nothing can remove."

The powerful fellow now assisted the girl aboard the ship, the others quickly following, after which the boat was hauled up and secured in its place.

"You have lost your father, or dear friend, perhaps, my poor boy!" said Captain Tom, advancing and speaking in the compassionate tone which he so often used, as all who knew him could testify.

"Not a father, sir, only an old and tried friend, almost the only one I ever had."

"I am sorry my men were too late to save him, my boy, but it was inevitable that he should perish. Cease to mourn him, however, for he is at rest, and you will find plenty of true friends here, who will see that you want for nothing. You look like a brave lad, and for such there is always room upon the *Firefly*."

Captain Tom was about to turn away, when Iron Arm approached and said:

"If you please, sir, the young person wishes to speak to you on particular business."

"Well, boy, speak freely," said Tom. "I never yet turned a deaf ear to any one in distress. What do you wish to say to me, boy?"

"I am not a boy," replied the other, blushing, "but a woman. Misfortune has made me thus disguise myself."

"A woman?"

"Yes, and an unhappy one. Good fortune has brought me to you, and I may be the means of doing you an act of kindness in return for the gift of my life. You are Captain Tom Drake, of the American Navy?"

"I have that honor; and I am Captain Tom Drake, at your service."

"Your wife was formerly——"

"My wife!" cried Tom, excitedly. "Speak, woman! She is in some deadly peril! I know it by your pale face, your trembling lips, your agitated manner!"

"Her life and honor are both at stake."

"Great Heaven!" cried Tom, fervently, "support me in this hour of trial!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIABOLICAL PLOT OF TWO VILLAINS.

For a moment Captain Tom stood as if dazed, and then seizing the girl's hand in his, said hoarsely:

"Come into my cabin. Your story is meant for no ears but my own. Sorrows like this of mine should not be known to every one."

Then releasing the woman, he bowed her politely into his own private apartments, where he followed instantly, closing and locking both doors.

"Be seated, madam," he said, removing his hat, "and when you are ready proceed with your story. You need refreshment, perchance."

"No, no; though perhaps a glass of wine——"

Tom at once went to an elegant side-board, opened a door and producing a decanter, filled a glass with rich wine and handed it to his guest.

She drank a portion of it, and then placing the glass upon the table, said quietly:

"My name is Constance Moreland, and I am an English woman by birth, though an American at heart. Forced to leave the country of my adoption, however, and return to England, I there became acquainted with your wife."

"Minnie in England?" said Tom. "This is impossible. It is not a year since I left her in America, and scarcely two months since I received a letter written in her own hand."

"Allow me to proceed. You perhaps know Lady Castlemaine?"

"Lady Castlemaine? She is a traitress, claiming to be a distant relative of my wife. She pretends the utmost kindness, although she is as false as hades."

"She is a scheming, unprincipled woman, indeed."

"I know her well," added Tom. "Did not I trust Minnie to her hands, and did not the treacherous Jezebel seek to force my darling to wed a man she detested? Did she not nearly betray me as well?"

"She has never forgiven you for carrying your wife away, and it is in this woman's power that your darling now is."

"How learned you this?"

"Listen. My story is a long and sad one, and must be told in my own way."

"Proceed, madam; my time is at your service."

"As I told you, I left America to return to England. The reason for my so doing was that my husband, whom I had seen but little, our marriage having been brought about by my father, with no regard to my feelings, required my presence in England."

"It was a matter of an inheritance, and my father sent for me peremptorily. And wishing to oblige him and see whether I could really love the man to whom I had been wedded, I set sail."

"I arrived in England, saw my father and husband. The business was settled satisfactorily. My father went his ways, and I was left with a man whom I felt I could never love."

"In the meantime Lady Castlemaine, together with this man, Hugh Moreland, had contrived to lure your wife over to England by means of false letters purporting to come from you."

"Your own cousin, one Reuben Harpy——"

"Yes; the villain! I know him well. Proceed."

"This man forged your name to letters which entreated your wife to meet you there and go with you upon a cruise."

"And did Minnie fall a prey to this wretched device?"

"The letters were so adroitly worded that she feared some peril had befallen you, or that it threatened, and in her boundless love she obeyed the summons and embarked for England."

"When she reached there she was met by Lady Castlemaine, with many expressions of love and affection, and invited to her castle on the coast."

"She at first refused to go, but the evil-minded woman threw out some dark hints concerning some peril to which you were exposed, and the poor child accompanied her at once."

"The inheritance which my husband had obtained was from relatives of my own, but not being entailed, it would go to him; and now that he possessed it, he had no longer any need for me."

"Now comes the whole diabolical plot, than which there never was a blacker ever perpetrated. You are listening?"

"Yes, yes, go on, and do not keep me in suspense."

"Lady Castlemaine's estate had been greatly depleted, and she was upon the verge of ruin. Money alone could secure her the maintenance of that courtesy and homage which she had always been paid."

"Without riches her detestable character would have been exposed, and as she had several schemes of her own on hand, money was needed in order to keep up appearances."

"My husband, Hugh Moreland, was tired of me, since all he wanted was my wealth, and that he now had, and it lay in Lady Castlemaine's power to enrich him, and at the same time provide herself with the means she required for furthering her schemes."

"I was reported dead, and was removed to a

lonely part of Lady Castlemaine's residence, where I was kept a close prisoner."

"Then it was announced that you had perished, had been killed in an engagement with an English frigate, and proofs were not wanting to convince your poor wife that such was the case."

"Then Moreland, with my wealth to back him, laid siege to Minnie's heart, Lady Castlemaine having promised—for a large consideration—to secure the poor girl as his wife."

"He had known her in times past, had been madly jealous of your success in obtaining her hand, and had resolved to possess her at all hazards."

"But I do not know the villain," said Tom.

"He was a friend and tool of one Sanderson, whom you must remember."

"Not Angel? He is dead."

"No, not Angel, but a man fully as bad. The name of Moreland I believe to be an assumed one."

"Proceed, madam; your recital gains in interest."

"Your death was to be but a matter of time, as Reuben Harpy was to accomplish that, and therefore he could easily bring himself to uttering a falsehood to accomplish his aim."

"The plot, then, as it stood, was this: You and I were dead; Moreland had a fortune, and Minnie, to drown her sorrow, was to be induced, nay, forced if need be, to wed him; Lady Castlemaine was to receive a large share, and I was to be driven mad and perhaps murdered."

"As foul a plot as ever the devil invented."

"That was not all; if Minnie proved obdurate, which, to her credit be it said, she did, she too was to be sacrificed, and a forged certificate of marriage between her and Moreland brought forward."

"I will show you the motive for this last act of villainy."

"Moreland, as her widower, could not inherit her property, but Lady Castlemaine, being her nearest relative, could, you being proved dead. This would increase her fortune, but in the meantime she must have ready money, and this Moreland supplied."

"But how did you learn this plot?" asked Tom. "They certainly did not confide their secret to you?"

"No, but I escaped from my place of confinement and, concealing myself in Lady Castlemaine's boudoir, heard the whole villainous plot disclosed."

"Step by step the two conspirators went over everything that had been done, and I, in my place of concealment, heard every word."

"They told what they had done, and what they proposed to do; how forged letters were sent to you, in order that you might have no apprehensions; how Reuben, with stolen papers commanding a British cruiser, was to betray you; and lastly, how, within two weeks, your poor Minnie was to be sacrificed, and her inheritance stolen from her."

"Good Heaven!" cried Tom, "how long ago was this?"

"Ten days."

"Then, I may not be too late yet," cried Tom, striking his hand heavily upon a bell near him.

To Harry Vere, who came at the call, and whom he admitted, he said, briefly:

"Clap on all sail, and steer for England!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONCLUSION OF A STRANGE STORY.

"To England!"

Thus did Harry Vere repeat his commander's last words.

"Yes."

"But what takes you to England?"

"Business of the utmost importance."

"Will you not share your secrets with me, Tom?"

"Yes, but first deliver my instructions. We must not lose a minute."

Harry Vere hastily retired, and in a few moments the giving of hurried orders and the tramping of men could be heard.

The shrill pipe of the boatswain sounded above all the din, and the quick answers of the men as they flew to obey the orders showed that all was bustle and activity.

The creaking of blocks, the unfurling of sails, the whistling of the wind, the hurrying to and fro of the sailors, the shouts of the officers, all these sounds combined, gave evidence that some unusual excitement was going on, and told Tom that his crew were fully in accord with him, and that, go where he would, they were ready to follow.

After a little the noises subsided, and Harry Vere came below, looking flushed and excited, as indeed he was.

"Now, Harry," said Tom, "to be brief, I am going to England to rescue Minnie from a great peril. Heaven knows if I shall be in time; but if I am not, some one will have to pay a dreadful reckoning."

He then related, in a few words, what Constance had told him; after which he said:

"Will you tell us how you escaped, and how it was we came to find you disguised as a boy, with no companion but that old man, in an open boat on the wide ocean?"

"The story is a painful one," said the woman; "but I will tell it, since it concerns you as much as the rest."

"After hearing the whole plot of these two accomplished villains, as I may call them, I waited patiently for an opportunity to escape, hoping to be able to outwit them yet."

"In the dead of night I stole from my hiding-place, and getting out of the house with considerable difficulty, made my way to a magistrate's, intending to lay the whole case before him."

"Unfortunately, I could not get to see him at once, and while waiting, strolled out into the air, in order to calm my excited nerves; when what was my misfortune to come suddenly upon my husband!"

"He had a couple of villains with him, and one of these swore that I had escaped from a mad-house; that I was a dangerous character, and did not know what I was saying; that I imagined all sorts of things, and that I would kill somebody if I was not locked up."

"I felt, indeed, as if I could kill one man, and that man the cause of all my misery, and in my frenzy I raved like a madwoman, indeed; so that the magistrate, instead of hearing my story, committed me to bedlam, and the three miscreants took me away with them."

"I was locked up in the most horrible place that the mind can conceive of, and I believe that I would have gone mad indeed had not an unforeseen event occurred."

"It appeared that the friends of one of the inmates of the place confined there against his will like myself, being perfectly sane, had formed a plan for effecting his escape upon the very night that I was put there."

"Unfortunately for him, however, I was put into the cell he had occupied, while he was placed in a horrible dungeon, unknown to his friends, who raised a ladder to my window and took me out."

"I realized the mistake at once, but said nothing, the night being so dark that the error was not observed, and owing to their wrapping me at once in a voluminous cloak, which prevented them from seeing the difference in dress."

"When we reached the ground, I was hurried away to a close carriage, which I entered, the men getting upon the box."

"Before doing so, however, one of them told me that I would find a suit of clothes in the carriage, which I had better put on instead of the bedlam uniform—it seems that the men had a distinctive dress, as though they had been convicts—so that if we were pursued I need not be recognized."

"I need not say that I accepted the situation and exchanged my own clothes for those in the carriage, knowing that in them I would run less risk of being recognized."

"It was perhaps wrong in me not to tell the friends of the unfortunate man of the mistake they had made, but I was too excited to think of anything but myself, and so said nothing."

"Once the carriage stopped at a tavern, and one of the men said he would bring me a glass of brandy to settle my nerves, but after I had taken it, and before the carriage drove on again, the men being both upon the box, I slipped out and hid until the sound of the wheels was lost in the distance."

"Then I arose and fled away into the darkness, not caring which way I went so long as I could escape from my cruel persecutors."

"The glass of spirits I had taken, instead of nerving me, soon began to mount to my head, for being unused to strong drink, I had taken more in my excitement than what would have sufficed, and before long I fell by the wayside, utterly stupefied."

"When I awoke it was broad daylight, the sun shining full in my face, and the sights and sounds about me indicating that another day had advanced considerably upon its journey."

"While I had slept, some one, evidently a person who knew its value, had cut off all my long, beautiful hair, making me look like a convict; but as I had more the appearance of a boy than before, I did not mourn its loss very much, feeling sure that now I would indeed pass unrecognized should my enemies chance to see me."

"I was tired and hungry, I had no money, and did not know my way, but I was free; and all

else was as naught to me with this blissful thought rushing through my mind."

"I forgot that others were in peril besides myself, and only remembered that I was out of the power of my enemies, and free to come and go as I chose."

"As I walked along the country road, thinking this delightful thought over and over again, a company of men suddenly attracted my attention; and I stood still, wondering whether they had been sent out to apprehend me or not."

"As I stood there, bewildered, and not knowing which way to turn, they surrounded me, and I presently discovered that I was in the hands of the press gang."

"I did not care very much, for I saw that there was a chance of escape, and that there would be plenty of time to make my identity known, after the ship, on board of which I was placed, had left land."

"There was an old man impressed at the same time, and he and I became great friends, being companions in misfortune. He guessed my secret, but promised to keep it, and in many ways saved me from annoyance and discovery; as otherwise I should have been subjected to trials which I could never have borne."

"When the ship sailed and the land faded from sight, I remembered the peril of your poor wife, and thought how wicked and selfish I was to have forgotten all about her."

"We had passed Gibraltar, when one dark, stormy night I implored the old man to leave the ship and trust to the mercy of the waves rather than remain on board one day longer."

"He was as eager to be free as I, and we stole one of the small boats—how we managed it I cannot tell—and embarked upon our perilous journey."

"We were nearly swamped once and lost our water and provisions. The waves had badly damaged our boat, and when you found us there seemed but little hope for us, but that Providence which watches over us all directed you to me, and I was saved."

"Fortune threw me into your path, and now my only hope is that you may reach England in time to save an innocent creature from death, or even a worse fate, and make you the means of punishing two of the vilest creatures that ever had existence."

"Believe me," cried Tom, "I will move heaven and earth to rescue Minnie, and bring these miserable miscreants to justice."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS TOLLING OF A BELL.

It was midnight, and the *Firefly*, under a full spread of canvas, was scudding along before the wind, the waves breaking into foam all around her, and now and then a shower of spray, bright with the phosphorescence, striking the fore-castle and falling upon deck."

No one was upon deck except the regular watch and the officer that headed it, the rest being asleep in their hammocks below."

Suddenly a thick mist arises, and the man on the lookout can hardly see the end of the jibboom."

Like a thick veil the mist settles over everything, heavy, clammy and burdensome, chilling one's very bones, and covering one's face and clothing with a damp like that of death itself."

It grows thicker and thicker, and the lights in the rigging appear dimmed by it, as though it were a noxious vapor which was hurtful to life and light, and sought to destroy them."

Heavier and denser it settles over ship and wave, until all is enveloped in a clammy gray cloud, which not only congeals the blood, but dampens the spirits as well, its effect being most depressing."

In the midst of the dreariness and desolation which ensues a startling and most unusual sound is heard."

The tolling of a great bell in this waste of waters."

Ding—dong!

Ding—dong!

It tolls with a regular stroke, and each peal seems to send a shudder through the frames of the listeners, who cannot but regard the sound with feelings of terror."

Ding—dong!

Ding—dong!

Slowly and steadily, and with a solemn sound, the deep notes clash out upon the silent air."

Is it the knell of some departing spirit?

Is it real, or do the listeners only imagine that they hear the awful sound?

The tolling of a bell in the mist and fog out upon the wide ocean!

What can it mean?

This is no trick of the seamen, for at that moment the bells forward and aft tell the hour, and mingled with the sound comes this heavy tolling once again."

Vain is it for them to try and pierce the impenetrable mist, to ascertain the cause of the strange sound."

It is impossible to see one foot beyond the rail."

"Mr. Somers," says the officer on the quarter-deck to one of the midshipmen, "go below, if you please, and bring me a speaking-trumpet."

It is brought to him, and putting it to his lips, he shouts out in stentorian tones:

"Ahoy, there! Bell ahoy! Who are you, and whither bound?"

He waits for several moments, expecting an answer, but none comes."

"It is some vessel, doubtless, lost in the fog like ourselves," he murmurs, "and they are sounding the bells for safety's sake."

"In my opinion it's Davy Jones and his phantom crew out for a lark," said Jerry Mizzen. "It'll be a mercy if we don't see 'em."

Ding—dong!

Ding—dong!

Still that same monotonous tolling."

Steadily and slowly, every note sounding at regular intervals, the unseen bell peals forth its solemn message, and all hands are hushed in silence."

"I will hail it again," says the officer, and raising his trumpet to his lips, he roars louder than before:

"Bell ahoy! What vessel is that, and whither bound?"

No answer but the tolling of the bell."

Slowly and with dreadful monotony the sonorous notes fall upon the ear, and every man holds his breath in very terror from the deep mystery which surrounds the affair."

"Mr. Somers," says the officer, "call the first officer."

In a few minutes Harry Vere comes on deck, and hearing the bell, says:

"What is that?"

"We cannot make it out, sir. There is no vessel to be seen, and I have hailed the thing twice."

"Does it seem to come nearer as we proceed?"

"No, sir; and it seems perfectly inexplicable."

"I don't understand it," murmured Harry. "I am not superstitious, but there appears to be no explanation for the thing. I don't disbelieve in warnings, but I would rather have some better explanation of the matter."

Finally he concluded to call Tom, as the men were getting nervous and restless, and he feared that their alarm might be contagious, and that all hands would be unfit for work."

Going below, he awoke Tom and told him what was the matter, the young captain hurrying on his clothes and hastening on deck as quickly as possible."

He listened attentively, but could hear no sound."

"There!" cried the officer; "do you not hear it?"

"No," said Tom.

"Nor I," added Harry.

"But you heard it before?"

"Yes, and so did we all."

"There—there! do you not hear it now?" cried the officer, with the most terrible excitement."

"I hear nothing!"

"Nor do I!"

"But, my God! captain, it is louder than ever. Mr. Somers, do you not hear it?"

"No, sir."

"There it is again. Boatswain, young gentlemen, seamen!" he cried, appealingly, to all within sound of his voice, "do you not hear it?"

"No, sir," said the midshipman.

"No, sir," added the sailors, in hushed tones.

"Nor you, Captain Drake? nor you, Lieutenant Vere?"

"We hear nothing!"

"And it is fairly thundering in my ears. My God! I am going mad. No, no; it is a warning of death—my death, since I alone can hear it. Heaven have pity on me!"

Then he reeled and fell to the deck insensible, when he was carried below and the surgeon sent for."

"He has a malignant fever and will die before morning," said Dr. Shrike."

"But he was well this evening," answered Tom, to whom this communication was addressed."

"He has a fever nevertheless, and a fatal one. We are off the Spanish coast. The bell we heard was from a convent. Sound travels to enormous distances under certain conditions of the atmosphere."

"But he heard it when we did not."

"Sharper ears and a more vivid imagination," replied the doctor, sententiously."

"But the fever? The health on the ship is excellent at this time."

"Caught it in Africa. Blood too stagnant; damp air increased it. Maybe some fever germs

have been blown from the Spanish coast. Terribly unhealthy place. Convent bells often toll for the victims of the plague."

"I am glad that you try to account for this by natural causes, but I cannot explain the matter myself, and would hate to have any superstitious fear gain ground among the sailors."

At this moment Somers, the midshipman, came up and said, respectfully:

"Beg your pardon, sir, Mr. York is dead!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE STORM—THE PLOT.

WHETHER the tolling of the bell had been produced by natural causes like those suggested by Dr. Shrike or any other, or whether it were indeed a mysterious forerunner of death, was hard to tell, and Tom was greatly puzzled to explain the matter satisfactorily to himself.

Certain it was, however, that the officer had died of a fever of which there were no other cases on the ship, and the symptoms of which had not appeared until after the mysterious tolling.

However much they tried to explain the mystery, the more they tried the deeper it grew, and as there are myriads of wondrous happenings at sea, and many cases stranger than the above which are well authenticated, we ourselves will not undertake to sift the matter, but must let our readers be content with the simple record of the facts as they occurred to our hero, and the accounts of which are still preserved in the family records.

Two days after the events just narrated, the ship encountered a severe gale, and for several hours scudded along under bare poles, as not a stitch of canvas could be kept in place, so fierce was the wind.

Anon it would seem to lift the vessel nearly out of the waves and then dash it down again until the billows fairly surged over both rails, a perfect flood of water rushing from stem to stern, and washing away everything movable that came in its path.

Luckily the officers and men were firmly lashed to the rigging, as otherwise they would have been swept overboard and drowned.

No boat could live in such a sea had it been launched to go to the rescue of any unfortunate seaman, and as Tom had given strict orders that no one should come upon deck except such whose duty called them thither, there were no accidents to be recorded.

A thick darkness fell over all the scene, the gloom being dimly lighted by a number of pale blue lights which affixed themselves to the ends of the spars and at the top of each mast, the appearance filling the sailors with superstitious dread.

"I've seen such lights before, and they never meant no good," muttered Jerry Mizzen, securely lashed to the fore-rigging. "I don't like 'em one bit."

"They're only St. Elmo's fires, and there's no harm in 'em," answered Bob. "Some folks say they're the souls of dead sailors, lost and gone, coming back to visit the scenes of their past lives, but that's all rubbish."

"I don't know about that," answered the credulous Jerry, "for if the souls of some sailors I've known could come back, I reckon there'd be plenty of fire hanging to 'em."

As for Tom, although he had no superstitious fears, he could but feel that the lights presaged some disaster to himself, although he was fully aware that their presence was due to electricity, and that they boded no more harm than the lightning or any other exhibition of nature's powers, which might or might not be dangerous.

Constance Moreland, who, owing to the lack of suitable raiment on board the *Firefly*, still retained the garb of a boy, was visibly disturbed by these natural phenomena, and seemed to feel that they boded no good to Captain Tom and his projects.

She remained in the rigging, despite Tom's entreaties that she should go below, and watched minutely every phase of the storm as though she would have read their fate in the clouds, and gathered a warning or a hope from the lightning.

The tempest passed without doing them any material injury, and Tom once more crowded on all sail, hoping vainly that he would yet reach England in the short time allotted to him.

This was an impossibility, for the fastest steamer of our own day could hardly have accomplished the feat.

He reached the coast of France three days after the time had expired, and immediately steered for Falmouth, that being the nearest point to Lady Castlemaine's estate.

The wind came on to blow again, however, and

being driven far out of his course, he was obliged to put in at Plymouth for safety, the rule of "any port in a storm" being an imperative one in that instance.

Luckily it was nearly night when he dropped anchor, and therefore he was not discovered by any of the jealous officials on the lookout for suspicious vessels, there being a great number of those gentry cruising about the harbor at that time.

The *Firefly* lay right under the lee of a good-sized vessel of her own build, which sailed in his Majesty's service and carried twelve guns, besides a swivel amidship, and mustered a goodly crew as well.

The privateer, disguised as a clumsy Dutch lugger, in case any one should be spying about, passed unnoticed, except from a few of the officers aboard the English vessel, who laughed at his clumsy build and rigging and passed uncomplimentary remarks as to his sailing abilities, for Tom had so disguised his pretty vessel by means of paint, canvas and timber, that she was utterly unrecognizable.

"Never mind, my fine fellows," thought Tom, who, in the garb of a Dutch skipper, sat on the rail smoking a huge pipe and took in the whole conversation, "the Dutch lugger may give you a surprise yet."

When night fell, the young commander, with a few of his bravest men, went ashore in a boat to reconnoiter, Harry Vere remaining upon the *Firefly*.

An hour later, as he sat in the tap-room of a tavern, evidently oblivious to everything but his pipe and pot, Jerry Mizzen sauntered in, apparently drunk, and stumbling against him, whispered cautiously:

"There's the best chance you ever had to capture that vessel, captain. The commander isn't known to his men, and he ain't going abroad till morning."

"Where is he?" whispered Tom, letting himself fall, with Jerry on top.

"At a ball in the town. His name is Lord Mouton. Bob and I found out all about it, and Ben has spotted his coachman and flunkys, and got 'em as full o' rum as hogsheads."

"Tom, that vessel shall be ours. Meet me in a quarter of an hour and take a note to Lieutenant Vere."

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM OUTWITS HIS OLD ENEMIES.

THE gorgeously-decorated salons of the Lady X—were gay with brilliantly-dressed ladies, officers in uniform and gentlemen in full reception toilet, the lights and flowers, the music and the hum of conversation making the scene one to be remembered.

Prominent among the guests was a tall, dark, handsome-looking young officer dressed in a green uniform, with an abundance of gold lace, and his breast fairly covered with decorations.

"Who is he?" asked everybody, but no one seemed to know, although some of the officers said that he was a South American of some kind.

There was one lady who appeared to know better than this, for although she said nothing, she contrived to beckon the young man into the conservatory, which was unoccupied at that moment, and when they were alone, placed her hand upon his arm and said:

"Captain Tom Drake, what new danger is this that you are running into?"

"Lady Arbuthnot," said Tom, for his fair companion was indeed his beautiful friend of former days, "I know you to be my friend, and can confide in you."

"Do you not know that Moreton is in command of the *Intrepid*, in the harbor, and that he would be more than pleased to capture your saucy vessel?"

"I intend to capture his, and you must assist me."

"If it were known that—"

"It need not be. All I want is for you to grant him an interview in the garden. I know he wants it, for I have seen how he has hovered around you all the evening."

"And, then—"

"My men will abduct him, and I will go aboard his vessel and take command."

"Bold as ever, I see. You must be cautious, though, for Vane and Claremont, and all your old enemies, are here, and may recognize you."

"I will take the risk. One thing more. Do you know anything of Minnie?"

"Your wife?" asked Claire Arbuthnot, in surprise; "is she not in America, with your—"

"She was, but has been lured away," and Tom related all he had heard.

"I have heard nothing of this," declared the lady. "Oh, that wicked Lady Castlemaine! What a reckoning she will have, some day!"

"Then, you know nothing?"

"Nothing."

"If you did, you could help me. I must not stay longer, for time presses. Do as I ask and the *Intrepid* will be mine by the morning."

* * * * *

The *Intrepid* lay in the harbor, nobody stirring aboard her except a few whose duty kept them on deck, as it was expected that the new commander would come aboard in the early morning.

The officer on duty was not prepared, however, to see Captain Lord Moreton as early as this, and when he heard the sound of oars, and saw a boat approaching, he hardly knew what it meant.

The barge pulled alongside, and the coxswain asked that a ladder might be lowered.

"Captain Lord Moreton has come to take command," he said. "He will explain his reasons for so doing in person. He particularly requests, however, that absolute quiet may be observed."

In a few moments our hero, in Lord Moreton's dress, and with Lord Moreton's documents in his possession, stepped upon the quarter-deck, and presented his credentials to the retiring captain, who had remained on board, and now came forward.

Both captains went below, and Tom said, after mutual courtesies had passed between them:

"I know to a certainty that the impudent Privateer Tom—better known as Captain Tom Drake—is in this very port, and will sail in the first dawn of the morning. I shall be pleased to have you assist me in his capture."

"It will give me the utmost gratification, my lord, to do so. Your career as commander of the *Intrepid* opens prosperously, I must admit."

* * * * *

"Do you see that vessel just getting under sail?"

"Yes; she is a clumsy-looking craft enough. She came in last night."

"That is the *Firefly*."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. Raise your colors and see what answer she will make."

Captain Tom and the late commander of the *Intrepid* were standing upon the quarter-deck in the early morning, before any one on board any of the other vessels in port was stirring, watching the movements of the supposed lugger.

The *Intrepid* hoisted her colors and began to get up sail, when there was an instant change in the appearance of the stranger.

The canvas masking upon her sides fell away, the heavy lugsails disappeared, and there was exposed to view the trimmest and daintiest little craft that was ever seen.

Up ran the Stars and Stripes, and a defiant shot came whizzing over the waters, waking the echoes and startling the sleepy inhabitants of Plymouth from their slumbers.

"It is the *Firefly* indeed," said Tom. "Let us give chase and capture the bold privateer while he is in the harbor."

Somehow or other, however, the new captain did not seem to know how to properly chase a vessel, for the *Firefly* drew rapidly away from the *Intrepid*, and it was not until both were well clear of the harbor that the supposed Lord Moreton, acting under the suggestions of her former commander, began to gain upon the *Firefly*.

Glancing over his shoulder, Tom saw a stir going on in the harbor, and suspecting that his plans had been discovered, and that he was being followed, he determined to bring the affair to a termination at once.

Bob and Jerry had secreted the captured lord in an old stable adjoining Lady X—'s residence, and from this he had escaped; and at the very moment that the *Firefly* sailed, he was exposing the matter to the commandant.

"It is that villain, Tom Drake, who has done this," he cried. "He has my papers and my ship; and unless we do something, we shall be laughed at by all England for having been made fools of."

While measures were being taken to capture Tom, he was hauling up on his own vessel, and presently began to send shot after shot toward her, taking good care, however, that none of them proved effective.

The *Intrepid* was almost alongside of the *Firefly*, the latter not having fired a shot since the first one, when she suddenly opened upon her adversary and poured in a broadside.

It shook the vessel from stem to stern, carrying away the foremast, tearing down the rail, and doing much general damage.

A second broadside followed, and when the smoke cleared away the *Firefly* was discovered to be fast to the *Intrepid*, and the latter's colors hauled down.

"My lord! my lord! this is disgraceful," cried

the *ave* captain. "You surely have not surrendered?"

"I have indeed," cried Tom, as Harry Vere, Ben Barnacle, and a score of sailors and marines came on board, "and to myself!"

Then throwing off his outer coat, he stood before the astonished captain in the uniform of an American officer, and cried:

"I have yielded to my own ship, for I am Captain Tom Drake!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ENEMY DISAPPOINTED—ON SHORE AGAIN.

"BETRAYED!" cried the captain.

"Not at all—outwitted," answered Tom. "Lieutenant Vere, take this gentleman's sword."

"And the *Firefly*? They are beginning to give chase."

"I will take command, and you will remain here and get off if you can; if not, destroy her, and I will pick you up in boats."

Tom accordingly went over to the *Firefly*, and Harry Vere took command of the other vessel, crowding on all sail and following the lead of his gallant commander.

The English frigate in the harbor had already begun to follow, and it was evident that there would be a lively chase.

Smarting under their defeat by the dashing Yankee privateer, they seemed determined to make amends for their loss by capturing the *Firefly* and making an example of her young captain by hanging him as a pirate.

It is always necessary, however, to catch your man before you hang him, and there did not seem to be much chance of their doing either, as Tom was now a good distance in advance, and rapidly running away from them.

Had not our hero had such an important matter upon his mind, the rescue of his darling Minnie from the hands of the cruel enemies, he would doubtless have remained behind and fought his enemies, even though they outnumbered him, three to one, but this was not to be thought of, and he scudded away, resolving to give the pursuers a good chase, and finally defeat them after all.

Several shots were fired after him, but they only had the effect of crippling the other vessel, doing him no damage whatever.

Harry Vere soon determined to abandon the prize, and he signaled Tom to that effect, so as to be taken up as soon as his plans were matured.

The boats were lowered, the prisoners being put into them, and then the vessel was fired in several places at once, so as to make her destruction more certain.

Vere himself was the last man to enter the boats, and as they moved away the doomed vessel was one mass of flames.

The pursuers crowded on all sail in hope of either preventing the destruction of their vessel or at least of capturing some of the *Firefly's* crew, but both these hopes were doomed to disappointment.

When within two cable's lengths of the *Firefly*, which had lain to in order to pick them up, the abandoned vessel blew up with a loud report, the flames having by this time reached the magazine.

Not a stick was left remaining, and the chagrin of the British vessels may be better imagined than described, particularly as Lord Moreton was on board one of them, and witnessed not only the destruction of his vessel, but of his chances for advancement also, as it was not likely that he would be appointed to another vessel after this disaster.

Tom, after taking up his own men, retained only the captain and chief officers of the other vessel as prisoners, allowing the petty officers and seamen to go free, leaving them in their boats, to be taken care of by their friends.

Then he fired a shot in defiance, and sailed away, leaving his pursuers to swallow their mortification as best they could, for there was not one of them that could come up with him.

"Now for the abode of that fiend in the guise of a woman, Lady Castlemaine," thought Tom; "and if she ever gets my darling into her hands again, may the Lord have mercy on her, for I won't!"

He did not say that he feared he might be too late, even now; for he determined not to give up all hope until the very last, resolving to do all that lay in his power to save one whom he loved better than all else in the world.

If he should be too late to save her, then let his enemies beware, for he would take such a revenge upon them as the world had never yet seen, and amply repay them for their treachery.

By nightfall Tom had reached that part of the coast where he desired to land; but fearing that

there might possibly be cruisers lurking about, he waited until dark before he ventured in.

When he had dropped anchor, he lost no time in going ashore, when he sent Jerry and Bob to look for a fleet horse, resolving to ride out to Lady Castlemaine's at once.

The two worthies whom he sent seemed to have their old faculty for getting into scrapes; for, grown bold from past experiences in getting out of trouble, they took no pains to disguise themselves, and consequently at the first place they stopped they were taken for what they really were—Yankee seamen.

Mine host of the Fowler and Pigeons, the inn where the two made their inquiries, suspected at once that something was wrong, but wisely kept his own counsel, making up his mind, however, to entrap his two guests.

"I can give you what you want, certainly," he said volubly. "It's a saddle horse, I take it."

"Aye, and a regular clipper-built one at that," responded Jerry, "one that'll go under full sail, and mind her helm like a lady."

"None o' your Dutch build," added Bob, "that can't go unless she has a gale of wind at her stern, which in a horse means whip, and spurs, and swearin', and hollerin' every minute, none o' them kind, but a reg'lar gentleman's animal."

"Oh, you want it for a gentleman, then—the captain, perhaps?"

"Yes, the captain, of course," answered Jerry, "and he won't take anything less'n a ten-knot one."

"Will the captain come after it himself?" inquired Boniface suavely.

"No, oh, no, we'll take it to him," replied Jerry, beginning to fear that perhaps he had been too free with his tongue, already loosened by a draught of strong ale, which the wily landlord had begged him to take, wherewith to seal the bargain.

"Oh, he'll wait till you bring it, eh? Very good. Set down, my friends, the ostler will be ready in a moment. He's heatin' 'is supper."

"Heatin' it?" queried Bob. "Was it cold?"

"Not heating, but heatin'; can't you perceive the difference?"

"Oh, yes, eating it, you mean, puttin' it inside his shirt."

"No, no, my man, putting hit hinside 'is stummick," replied the landlord's wife, now appearing at an inner door; "though I axes parding for using such a vulgar word hin the presence of my 'usband."

"Here's your health, missus," said Jerry, "and don't you worrit about using vulgar words. The stummick is a very necessary piece of rigging, and what's necessary can't be vulgar. Now if I hadn't any stummick I couldn't drink your good man's ale; but as I has, here she goes."

"Make yourselves comfortable, gents," said the host, "and I'll let you know when the animal is ready. Betsy, you look arter the bar while I speaks to Joe."

The wily fellow immediately sought the ostler, and said, cautiously:

"Joe, there's a gent's saddle 'oss wanted. Get out Balty Dan; he looks mild and hinnercent, but you knows what he is. And, Joe, keep your heye on the coves that takes him away and the cove that gets honto 'im, and tell me what sort he is."

"All right, gov'nor. I'll tellee all about it."

Ten minutes later, Bob and Jerry, in rather a boozy condition, led away the horse which Joe had brought, the ostler following them slyly, unobserved, and taking note of everything.

"I don't altogether fancy that Captain Tom will like the beast," said Jerry, the animal having already begun to show his viciousness.

"Oh, that's all right," retorted Bob. "It'll be a highly vicious beast that Tom Drake can't handle."

"Captain Tom Drake," muttered the ostler. "I've 'eard o' 'im afore. Maister will be glad to know this."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNRULY BRUTE CONQUERED—A SURPRISE.

"WHAT sort of brute is this you have brought me?"

"The very best in the place, captain."

"Then I can't say much for the others. Never mind, however, I think I can manage him."

Bob and Jerry had considerable difficulty conducting the vicious beast intrusted to them to the young captain, and he it was who had spoken.

Jerry had received a kick in the side from the ugly brute, which had nearly staved in a couple of his ribs, and Bob had been sent to grass by a blow in the stern from the animal's heels, which did much toward sobering him, and certainly

made him feel as though a horse had fallen on him.

They had succeeded in getting the animal to Tom, despite these troubles, but he at once realized what sort of a creature it was that he was to ride several miles upon, and did not contemplate an agreeable journey.

"Whoa, you devil in horseflesh!" he cried, seizing Balty Dan by the bridle. "Steady now, you brute; and once on your back, I will show you who is master, you or I."

Then, leaping adroitly upon the almost unmanageable steed's back, he reined him back upon his haunches, and said to his two companions:

"Now be off, and gather all you can. Be careful that you don't get locked up, though, for you don't seem in good condition to help yourselves."

He would have said more, but Balty Dan bolted away at this juncture, and our hero had all he could do to retain his seat in the saddle.

Determining to give the contrary beast all he wanted, however, Tom dug the spurs deep into the creature's sides, and lashed him across the flanks with his sharp whip, which fairly cut to the flesh.

Stung to fury by the unexpected treatment, the animal reared and plunged; but, finding that Tom kept his seat as though rooted to the saddle, he darted ahead with the speed of the wind, evidently intending to take his own course, lead where it might.

He found that Tom was more than a match for him, however, the young man having a grip of iron, and using it unsparingly.

He tried to get the bit into his teeth, but Tom had other intentions, and again the whip descended upon the creature's flank, the pain being fairly maddening.

Balty Dan tore down the country road with the speed of a racehorse, but Tom kept in his seat like a centaur, never budging an inch, and keeping a firm hold upon the rein.

After ten or fifteen minutes of this sort of thing, the horse began to desire a change, and attempted to slow up somewhat.

It was now Tom's turn, and he urged the brute, with whip and spur, faster than ever, giving him no respite, but keeping him to the same killing pace that he had himself chosen.

"You wanted to run," muttered Tom, "and now you can keep it up until I tell you to stop. I am master here, my frate friend."

Balty Dan reared and kicked and plunged, trying to throw Tom from his seat, but all to no purpose, for the daring young fellow remained glued to the saddle, and despite the beast's efforts to dislodge him, or break from the road, kept him in a straight course, and never let him swerve from it.

Trees, rocks, and hedges flew by, cottage and hovel shot past them on their terrible journey, and still Tom kept the steed to his work, tireless and undaunted himself, though the animal was beginning to show signs of fatigue.

His breath came heavily, and great flecks of foam rolled from his sides, but caring nothing for this, Tom urged him on, until at last, almost ready to drop from exhaustion, the conquered animal let his head fall and whinnied piteously for a release.

"So, so, you have come to terms, have you?" spoke up the young hero. "Well, I don't want to push you, and as you appear to have made up your mind who is the master, I will give you a chance to rest."

Then he turned to the now docile steed, and patting his neck spoke kindly to him and allowed him to jog along at a more easy pace than before.

"You can see that it is better to do as I want than to follow your own inclinations, don't you?" asked the young man. "You never had a true American on your back. I fancy, or you would long ago have had the nonsense taken out of you."

He presently allowed the horse to walk, speaking to him now and then in gently chiding tones, the animal seeming to understand him perfectly, and to know that here was his master, and that man's will, not his own, was to govern his actions in this event at least.

"You are not the first Briton who has tried to throw a Yankee," muttered Tom, as he increased his speed a trifle, using neither whip nor spur now but merely making his wishes known by word of mouth.

"You have failed, as have others," continued Tom, "and in this case, as in those that have gone before, the Yankee has proved the winner. Your countrymen would do well to take heed of the lesson I have taught you and give up trying to subdue a nation that knows not how to yield."

After riding a few minutes longer, Tom began to look about him for some landmarks by which to guide his course, for the road seemed totally unfamiliar and there was no one stirring to

whom he could apply for directions as to the proper road to take.

"I have no time to lose," he mused, "and I don't want to be wandering over the country all night looking for the right road. I had better push on a bit and maybe I shall discover some familiar object."

He pushed on therefore, and presently discovered in the distance, the towers of some castle standing out against the sky from above a grove of trees.

"That looks familiar," he muttered. "Although this road seems to turn off in the wrong direction, just ahead of me here. However, I will investigate the matter."

In a few minutes he saw a light shining amongst the shrubbery at the side of the road some few rods ahead, and he murmured softly:

"A light, eh? Perhaps an inn. If I do not find my way by the time I come up, I must needs ask mine host to direct me."

Urging his steed forward in the direction of the light, he was about to frame some inquiry which he would put to the inmates of the place, when the light suddenly disappeared and his horse stopped short, nearly throwing him from the saddle.

He was about to urge him on once more, thinking that perhaps he had fallen back to his old vicious ways, when he perceived what it was that had caused the animal to stop so abruptly.

Right before him, in the middle of the road, was the figure of a horseman enveloped in a black cloak and wearing a mask upon his face.

"Stand and deliver!" said the figure, sternly.

Tom realized the situation in an instant.

His road had been obstructed by a highwayman.

CHAPTER XIX.

TOM ACQUIRES NEW FRIENDS.

"Stand and deliver!"

These startling words broke upon Tom's ear as he began to urge his steed onward.

He instantly reined up, and drawing a pistol, cried promptly:

"Stand aside, or I will not answer for your life. You have no trifle to deal with, my man, so stand aside I say."

"Neither am I a trifle," replied the other. "I am Midnight Dick, the highwayman, and none dare dispute my word."

"You may be the devil for all I know," retorted Tom; "and I care not whether you are or no. I am armed as well as you, and will brook no hindrance."

He was about to urge his horse over the daring rider who stood before him, when the latter seized the bridle, and clapping a pistol to Tom's head, cried fiercely:

"Now, fool, yield, or I'll blow your brains out! Your money or your life!"

"By Heaven, you shall have neither!" cried Tom, and with one blow of his whip he cut the man across the face, tearing the mask off at the same time, and exposing the villain's face.

The highwayman fired, but the bullet merely grazed the top of Tom's hat, and in an instant he had lifted his assailant from the saddle and thrown him into the ditch.

"Lie there, Mr. Midnight Dick," he said, with a laugh, "and the next time you attempt to stop an honest man on his road, learn beforehand whether or no you are a match for him."

A second shot whistled past Tom's head, and thinking that perhaps the fellow might have companions at hand, and be taking this means of signaling them, our hero sprang from his horse and pulled the highwayman out upon the road.

"Now, mark you, my man," he said, determinedly, "you seem bold enough and are not such a bad-looking fellow, now that I come to examine your face, but you are in a bad business, and I advise you to give it up. If your companions come up and offer me any harm I will shoot you through the head."

"Who are you?" demanded the other.

"It matters not. I am your master at all events, and a bad man to trifle with. Do you make a practice of stopping gentlemen upon the road?"

"I am a free rider," said the other, "and never until now have I met my match. Join me and together we will make the country ring with our gallant deeds."

"Thank you. I have a higher mission to perform than becoming a highwayman. Have you companions?"

"Yes, but they are not at hand."

"It is lucky for you that they are not, for if they should come I would kill you. Be off with yourself, for I have no time to waste upon you. The neighbors will be around by your shots, and

once you are discovered, you will have to run for it."

"I fear them not. I can outdistance the whole cowardly crew on my fleet, more and one shot will disperse the crowd. Who are you that have thus braved the gallant Midnight Dick, until now without a rival?"

"Who am I? That concerns not you; but nevertheless I will tell you, at the same time warning you that if you betray my presence here to a single soul, your miserable life shall pay the forfeit. I am Captain Tom Drake, commander of the privateer *Firefly*, and the bitter foe of all British tyrants."

"Captain Tom Drake?" repeated the highwayman. "Then I am your friend, and whatever you ask I will do it."

"You do not know me, surely?"

"I know those whom you have cause to call your enemies. They are mine as well, and I will do all in my power to aid you."

"I accept your aid," said Tom, "but remember," he added, sternly, "if I see aught of treachery in your conduct, you die upon the instant."

"I cannot blame you for your suspicions," rejoined the highwayman; "but you will find me true to my word."

"One moment," said Tom. "Do you know aught of my affairs? Is my wife—"

"I know that you have been reported dead, and that your wife has long ceased to mourn for you."

"Liar!" cried Tom, fiercely, drawing his sword. "Take back the base calumny, or I will hew you to pieces!"

"Not so fast," said the highwayman. "I do but repeat the gossip of the castle. I believe in your wife's fidelity as much as you yourself do, and merely say what the gossips tell, not believing a word of all their stories."

"Then she is still alive?"

"It is so given out, but whether it be so or not I cannot affirm."

"That we must determine," cried Tom. "Forward, and if I find her not, I will not leave one stone upon another of that she-devil's abode!"

"Stay," said Dick, "you will need the assistance of my comrades. Shall I summon them?"

"Yes, but hasten, for I hear voices. We have aroused the neighbors. I cannot be detained now for any explanation."

"I will quickly summon my comrades when we have ridden further," and with that Dick followed Captain Tom's example, and mounting his horse, rode off at his side.

At the end of half a mile he suddenly paused and blew a shrill whistle, which was soon answered at a little distance, and presently three men came galloping down the road.

"What news, gallant captain?" called one. "Hot in danger?"

"Not so, but others are and we must take them aid," responded the highwayman, introducing Tom, but saying nothing of how the latter had so neatly subdued him.

"If it be Mistress Drake whom you would help," spoke up one of the highwaymen, "I fear me you will be of little assistance, for her corpse passed out of the castle gates but a quarter of an hour since, upon its way to the chapel and the tomb."

"Then, by Heaven, she has been murdered," cried Tom; "and this fiend, Lady Castlemaine, is at the bottom of it. Let her beware, for I will make her pay dearly for this act."

Then setting himself deep into his saddle, he said resolutely:

"If you be highwaymen, it is nothing; all I care for is that you have sworn to assist me. On, then, for I would know the worst at once."

"Command us as you will, we are ready to do your bidding," said all in a breath.

"Then, forward," and as the party dashed onward, the deep tones of a bell sounded from some steeple hidden among the trees, and not far away.

"Hark!" cried Tom.

"The funeral procession moving into the chapel," explained the man who had before spoken.

"It is the knell of these demons that I hear, as well as of my darling," groaned Tom. "Forward, friends, and let these wretches tremble."

CHAPTER XX.

THE INTERRUPTED FUNERAL.

ON dashed the young captain and his newly-found friends, the bell tolling slowly and solemnly as they rode on.

Suddenly the path turned abruptly, and the friends came upon a small stone chapel, the doors of which were open to receive a solemn procession just approaching.

Two black-robed figures bearing torches marched at the head of the procession, being followed by a company of priests, or mourners, and these in turn by four stout men, who carried a bier upon their shoulders, draped with black cloth.

Behind these again came a train of white-robed figures; but whether they were men or women could not be told, so completely enveloped were they by the garments they wore.

The sight was a solemn one, and was made doubly so by the gloom of night and the deep tones of the bell, tolling forth its monotonous knell.

Tom was visibly affected by it, but suddenly mastering his emotion he dashed forward and interrupted the solemn procession as it was about to enter the chapel.

"Hold!" he cried, "for whom are these solemn rites to be celebrated? What was the name and condition of the deceased?"

"An unhappy woman, whose husband was an outlaw, has passed away. Her friends could not deny her the last rites of Christian burial, and at their instance we have consented to waive the rules of the church."

"What mean you?" demanded Tom of the man who had thus answered him.

"That suicides deserve not to be buried in consecrated ground, but yielding to the prayers of—"

"Tell me the name of her whose body you bear to its last resting place?"

"She was called Minnie Drake, and was the relative of—"

"Then I demand to see the body of this unfortunate."

"You must not hinder us in the performance of our solemn duties," said the minister, coming from the chapel in his gown and surplice. "I pray you let the procession pass."

"Not until I have seen the face of her yon dark-robed figures bear upon their shoulders."

"It cannot be."

"But I tell you I have a right."

"What right have you to—"

"The right of a husband! I am Captain Tom Drake!"

At the mention of this well-known name there was a sudden commotion in the assembly, and then a woman's voice cried out:

"Arrest that man. He is an impostor. Captain Tom Drake is dead, hanged at the yard-arm of a British frigate."

The speaker was Lady Castlemaine, Tom having recognized her voice at the first word she uttered.

"It is you then, tigress," cried Tom spurring forward. "How have you murdered my wife? By the knife or poison? Speak quickly or I will not give you your choice, but dispatch you at once before you have time to make your peace with Heaven."

"Arrest that man, I say!" cried the woman, attempting to escape from the impetuous rush of the young commander. "He is a villain and a pirate, and there is a reward of one thousand guineas for his head!"

The crowd which had gathered in the rear of the procession now began to murmur and make hostile demonstrations, pushing forward towards where Tom and his friends stood, and a disturbance seemed inevitable.

"You're Gentleman Dick, the knight o' the road," said one stolid bumpkin. "A know un well; a robbed ma pookets o' a ma goold yestreen."

"Highwaymen!" yelled the crowd. "Down wi' them!"

Heeding not the presence of the procession, unmindful of the solemnity of the occasion, the noisy rabble dashed toward Tom and his friends and scattered the mourners right and left.

The bier was thrown to the ground, the pall rent in twain and the corpse exposed to view.

"Sacrilegious hounds!" cried Tom, dashing into the crowd, and belaboring their thick skulls with his riding-whip. "Do you see what you have done?"

He and the highwaymen quickly dispersed the louts, who, forced to keep their distance, retaliated with a shower of stones, doing more damage to the chapel windows, however, than to Tom and his friends.

Our hero knelt down by the coffin, and with his strong hands tore away the lid.

Then he started back in horror, while an expression of the greatest surprise crossed his face. The coffin was empty!

"What mockery is this?" he cried. "You bring but an empty casket to the church. Your sacred rites are but mummeries, your holy ceremonies but a delusion and a lie. There are no remains here, and yet you— By heavens! I see it all! My wife still lives!"

Then, springing up, he looked about him to

discover the treacherous Lady Castlemaine, to whom he owed all his misery.

She had suddenly departed, and with her, the mutes and pall-bearers, the clergyman and the various officials who would have assisted him.

The church-door was closed, and all was dark and drear, the bell had ceased tolling, and no one remained but the crowd of spectators who had been so eager to rush upon Tom.

"There is some mystery here," muttered the latter. "They dare not kill my darling, but wish her to be considered dead. Hence this mockery of a funeral. Follow me, and, if necessary, I will sack the abode of this monster of hypocrisy, the false-hearted Lady Castlemaine."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WILD RIDE OF TOM AND HIS NEW FRIENDS.

AWAY galloped Tom, the highwaymen following close behind, while right and left scattered the peasants and others who had made the assault.

"The country is ruined," muttered one old fellow with a prodigious stomach; "an army of robbers is abroad, and we shall all be murdered where we stand."

Then he tumbled heels over head into the ditch, impelled thither by his affrighted countrymen, while they scrambled out, leaving him to extricate himself as best he might.

"Call up the constables, ring the bells, burn watch-fires, somebody," shouted another country squire, not so fat, but more lusty of lung. "Egad, if we have to rouse the whole country we'll rid the land of these curses. One would think that Dick Turpin had come again."

Three or four huge fellows, with more biceps than brains, hurried into the little chapel at this, and soon the frantic clanging and clashing of the bell sounded out upon the air, startling the echoes, and spreading alarm far and wide.

Out upon the silent night air rang the clamorous tones, and soon they were answered by others from the hills round about, while hoarse shouts in the distance told that the whole country was alarmed and hastening to the scene of the excitement.

Messengers darted hither and thither, down lanes and narrow by-paths, carrying the dreadful news that a large party of highwaymen had invaded the country, and that nothing but a general uprising would suffice to put them down.

Watch-fires were lighted, and soon, from the tops of all the hills, for miles around, blazed answering fires, the whole neighborhood being in a perfect ferment.

Many of the messengers took short cuts through the fields, spreading the news so rapidly that there was great danger that our friends would be intercepted by the mobs which poured forth and filled the roads.

It was known which road they had taken, for Lady Castlemaine, rightly fearing that an attack would be made upon her abode, called upon the people to protect her castle, whither she told them, excitedly, the pirate Tom Drake and his outlaw friends were hastening.

While all this hubbub and outcry was going on, Tom and his new friends urged their steeds to the very top of their speed, for Dick well knew that the bumpkins would endeavor to intercept them, and he told Tom as much.

"A pretty hue and cry have I raised," said Tom, with a laugh. "Well, I live in constant excitement, and I cannot complain if I occasionally have a little more than usual."

"Whatever betides, we will see you through this affair," said Dick. "You are a brave man, and it is a pleasure to serve with such."

"Join my ship's company," replied Tom, "and you shall go with me to a land where you will not need to cut the purse strings of the rich in order to make a living, for there all are equal, and the glorious sun of liberty shines alike on all."

"Zounds! You almost tempt me to follow you," returned the highwayman. "Let us see what the night brings forth, however, for then I can tell better what I might do."

"The tumult increases," now spoke up one of the gentlemen of the road. "See! the alarm fires are blazing from every hill-top!"

"And bell answers bell in frightful confusion," put in another. "Such an uproar has not been heard since the time of Turpin and his gallant gentlemen."

"How far are we now?" asked Tom presently of his conductor.

"But a few minutes' ride. Take the first turn to the left, and dash up the hill."

"Ah, I remember it now. We are not likely to be intercepted on our way thither."

"No, but I fear that on our return——"

"One word," spoke Tom, hastily. "If we come safely out of this venture, will you join me on the *Firefly*?"

"I can hardly answer."

"Answer you must, one way or the other, for if you refuse, I cannot allow you to imperil your life further in my cause. I will on to the castle alone, and you and your men must look to your own safety."

"But if I say yes?"

"Then we'll strike hands and call it a bargain, and we will cleave together through thick and thin."

"What say you, friends?" said Dick, turning to his followers.

"Where you go, captain, that is our path," answered one.

"Your way is ours," said the rest, in a breath.

"Then, if we come safely out of this night's work, call Midnight Dick your messmate."

"And his dashing followers your slaves," added the others.

"Thanks," cried Tom, "it is a bargain. Yonder is the abode of this wicked woman, and there, beyond a doubt, I shall find my darling."

They dashed forward, there being now but a short distance to travel; when suddenly there was a rustling in the bushes by the roadside, and half a dozen men sprang into the road, forming a line which reached clear across it.

"Fire!" shouted the leader.

Tom recognized the voice in a moment.

His despicable cousin, Reuben Harpy, had indeed arrived before him, and was now disputing his path.

At the command so suddenly given, Tom suddenly bent forward, right upon his horse's neck, and whipping out a pistol, blazed away at the nearest man.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

In quick succession the reports rang out upon the air, the highwaymen answering upon the instant, the weapons of both parties being discharged literally in the faces of their opponents.

Two of the highwaymen uttered shrieks of mortal agony, and rolled from their saddles into the dust of the road, dead, while their riderless steeds dashed madly on, breaking through the line of the enemy and overturning the daring fellows who had thus disputed the road.

Tom was unhurt, and spurring his horse onward, he sent a shot flying so close to Reuben's head that it singed the hair upon his temples, and had liked to have ended the miscreant's life then and there.

"Forward!" yelled Tom, dashing past his false-hearted cousin. "The prize is almost within our grasp!"

CHAPTER XXII.

BOB AND JERRY FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES.

LET us return for the present to our old friends Bob Hauler and Jerry Mizzen, the comic Damon and Pythias of the *Firefly*.

Notwithstanding Tom's advice to them, to keep out of mischief, they walked directly into it, for hardly had the echoes of his horse's hoofs died away in the distance, than they returned to the tavern to indulge in another pot of beer apiece.

The treacherous ostler, being unable to follow Captain Tom, as he had expected, the latter having completely mastered his vicious steed instead of being thrown, this man now determined to capture our two friends and make them betray their comrades.

It was with undisguised joy, therefore, that he saw Bob and Jerry re-enter the tap-room and call for pipes and pots, intending to make a night of it.

Having seen them, through a crack in the door, comfortably seated and evidently enjoying themselves, he went out and got together a miscellaneous crowd of stable boys, scullions, ragamuffins and tramps, and at the head of this noble army, having sent a boy after the nearest constable, sailed valiantly into the tap-room.

"There are the infernal Yankee traitors," he cried. "Now then, boys, gi' un a larrupin', sich as they 'a nivr had in a' theer loives."

This was the signal for attack, and it began in hot earnest.

Before Bob and Jerry could comprehend what was up, in their muddled state of mind, a shower of missiles of various and sundry kinds, flew about their heads and brought them to a realizing sense of the situation.

Rotten eggs, decayed vegetables, puppies and

kittens, which had long since departed this life and had found a watery grave in the horse-pond, sticks, stones, and bludgeons, all these, and many other things too numerous to mention, flew about them, and, as with so many marksmen, some shots were sure to tell, the poor fellows received a good pelting."

Mirrors were demolished, mugs and tankards smashed and battered, tables overturned and the walls frescoed in a manner that made mine host's heart sick to see.

"Stop, stop, for the love o' the Lord!" he yelled, dodging an over-ripe turnip meant for Jerry—"stop, stop, mon, he'll hae the place ruined on me!"

"Gi' it to the pirates!" yelled the mob. "Gi' 'em blazes! Dang our bootens, gi' 'em a hound-in' fur once."

"Bust my topsail braces," yelled Jerry, leaping to his feet, "this 'ere are more than flesh and blood can stand! Take that, ye mealy-mouthed chaw-bacon!"

The particular "chaw-bacon" in question received the contents of Jerry's tankard in his face and those of Jerry's boot in the pit of his stomach, the latter doubling him up on the floor in pretty short order.

Bob Hauler, less sober than Jerry, was not a whit behind him in valor, for, seizing the heavy pewter pot from which he had been drinking, he brought it down upon the ostler's head with a force that, but for his thick skull and matted hair, would certainly have brained him.

He toppled over as it was, and lay upon the floor like one dead, while Bob and Jerry now returned the fire of their assailants with compound interest.

Pewter pots, earthen mugs, glasses, fire-irons, sticks of wood, chairs, stools, and table-legs, flew in quick succession at the heads of their enemies, who began to beat a hasty retreat, thinking that they had stirred up the wrong pigs this time indeed.

They were suddenly reinforced, however, by the constable, two beadles, a lawyer's clerk, and half a dozen farm hands, stalwart fellows the latter, and the tide of battle, which seemed for the moment to have set in favor of the two seamen, now turned against them.

"Murder, watch, thieves!" yelled the landlord's wife, as the new party made its appearance, but she was quickly reassured at sight of one of the beadles, for whom she had once had a sneaking affection, and she threw herself into the good man's arms with a force that nearly upset him, and quite upset her husband's patience.

Bob and Jerry, having used up their supply of missiles, now concluded that they had best beat a masterly retreat, trusting to luck to continue the fight at some more opportune moment.

The enemy had flanked them, however, and whichever way they attempted to escape they found new foes appearing and cutting off their retreat in all directions.

The thing was now getting serious, for up to this time neither had doubted their ability to get out of the inn when they had had all the fun they wanted, and to suddenly find that they had reckoned without their host, literally so in this case, they began to be alarmed for the first time.

The landlord now suddenly appeared, armed with a brace of huge horse pistols, loaded to the very muzzle, and with more zeal than discretion began to pepper away at our two friends in the most alarming manner.

Jerry was struck in the leg and Bob in the shoulder, both falling to the floor, where they were pounced upon, and ignominiously dragged off and put into the stocks.

This mode of punishment was still in vogue in England, albeit the pair that stood not far from the inn were rather rusty from want of use.

To the stocks our two worthies were hurried, the constable heading the procession, and the beadles following behind to keep the mob of small boys in check, for although it was night a large crowd of these young individuals had gathered, and were making the air fairly thick with shouts, yells, and catcalls.

"This e're is a pretty kettle o' fish," mumbled Jerry, as he was forced upon the rude bench by one of the beadles, while the other put his legs out straight in order that his feet might settle into the sockets intended for them.

Bob was placed next to his companion in misery, and then the heavy wooden bar was placed in position and secured with a rusty padlock.

"Make 'em tell where their pirate captain is," said the landlord, the ostler having communicated to him his discovery of Captain Drake's identity. "Keep 'em here until they do."

The constable put the question, but both Bob and Jerry stoutly denied any knowledge of Tom,

and as the ostler was not there to repeat his evidence, the landlord's story was considered rather shaky.

"Let 'em stay there till morning," said the constable, and then leaving one of the beadies to keep watch over the two culprits, much against his will, for the worthy functionary was anxious to get home and tumble into bed, he dispersed the crowd and went away, leaving the two seamen in limbo, wondering how they were going to get out of the scrape into which their love of beer and a frolic had placed them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM ONE PERIL TO ANOTHER.

DRIVING his spurs deep into the sides of his now nearly jaded steed, Tom overturned two of his adversaries and dashed up the hill, Dick and one of his comrades following.

The others had been thrown from their steeds, and as there was now no time to be lost but little attention could be paid them, although Dick would not otherwise have abandoned them.

The three riders soon reached the gates, and here Tom dismounted and made his way boldly into the court-yard, and thence to the servants' quarters.

The first person he met was a big, burly, brutal-looking fellow, who was leading forth a splendidly-built horse from the stables.

"Look you here, my man," said Tom, addressing him in tones that left no doubt in the fellow's mind that the speaker would be answered, whether or no, "where has your wicked mistress placed my wife, Mistress Minnie Drake?"

"Dead," said the man, shortly. "Put in the chapel vaults this blessed night."

"You lie, you slavish cur!" cried Tom, leaping upon the man and seizing him by the throat. "Tell me this instant, or I will tear the truth from your cowardly heart!"

"Within there!" roared the man. "Master Moreland! Tom, Hiram, Joseph! help from this devil of a pirate! Help, I say!"

Several men came rushing out at this moment, and by the light of the moon Tom recognized Moreland, the villainous husband of the poor girl he had rescued from such deadly peril.

Throwing the man to the highwayman, Tom sprang at the throat of the new-comer, and cried, in a voice of thunder:

"Wretch! villain! dastard! give me my wife before I tear you in pieces and throw your miserable carcass to the dogs!"

"Mercy!" pleaded the cowardly villain, falling to his knees, his boasted courage failing him in an instant.

"Speak then," cried Tom, holding his empty pistol to the scoundrel's head, while the two highwaymen kept the others in check.

"In the vaults," said the man, his form quivering with the deadly fear he felt.

"Give me the keys, wretch, and lead the way. No treachery, mind you, or quick goes a bullet into your brain."

"I have them not. Spare me, for the love of—"

"Keep your wicked tongue still, blasphemer," cried Tom in a rage. "Speak quickly and tell me who has them, or by the power that made me—"

"Martin, that man yonder, with the horse, it is he that keeps them."

Midnight Dick, upon hearing these words, snatched a bunch of keys from the bully's girdle, and forcing the trembling Moreland ahead of them, he and Tom compelled the wretch to lead the way to the vaults where the beautiful Minnie was consigned.

The place had been built in the old feudal times, and many of the original dungeons and strong chambers were kept as they had been in the old times, the present wicked occupant of the castle using them now in the furtherance of her diabolical schemes.

To the vaults Moreland now led the way, being forced by Tom and Dick, the latter's comrade keeping guard outside, ready to give warning in case of danger.

There was plenty of this in store for them all, Reuben Harpy not being a man who would tamely submit to his enemy's doing anything which displeased him.

He well knew that Tom would go to the castle, and he was also well aware that the coward Moreland would be easily subdued, but to get in was one thing and to get out was another, and Reuben determined to place all possible obstacles in the way of the latter achievement.

Hastening down the hill after Tom had passed, he quickly collected a regular rabble, caring lit-

tle whether Lady Castlemaine's abode were sacked and razed to the ground so long as Tom was sacrificed.

At the head of a vast mob he therefore sallied into the court-yard, and gave orders at once that the place be surrounded, and no one allowed to enter or leave except with his permission.

The highwayman, at sight of the crowd, wisely concluded to decamp, it being madness to attempt resistance against such a host.

He therefore dashed into the passage leading to the vaults, taking two horses with him, both fresh animals, leaving the jaded steeds outside.

On his way he met his leader and Captain Tom, who bore in his arms the unconscious form of a young woman, pale, but surpassing beautiful.

It was Minnie, whom Tom had rescued from a fate worse than death.

The knight of the road immediately communicated his startling news to his comrades. When Tom, turning to Moreland, said sternly:

"Show us a secure way out of this den of wickedness, scoundrel, or your base life shall pay the forfeit."

"Turn back, then," said Moreland, trembling with fright, "and open the second door on the left."

"Whither leads it, varlet?"

"To a narrow pass, steep and precipitous, and thence to the cliffs which directly overhang the sea."

"Is there a path along the cliff wide enough for a horse to make his way?"

"Yes, but you surely would not take your horses through the castle?"

"Aye, and through her lady's chamber, were it necessary. Ha! I hear shouts and hurrying footsteps. Haste, villain, or you will rue the day you ever met me."

Moreland hurried onward, his limbs trembling beneath him, and, unlocking the door he had spoken of, allowed the party to pass.

"Lock it again," cried Tom, impetuously, "and lead on. There is no time to lose. I fear we will be surrounded, but if I have to drive my steed breast deep through these hirelings' blood, I shall yet escape."

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOM'S HAZARDOUS LEAP.

Bob and Jerry had remained for about an hour in the stocks, their guard being very drowsy, when a great tumult was heard in the distance.

"What can that be?" asked Jerry, arousing himself.

"The captain is waking the country up," answered Bob.

"It's not often that it gets such a rousing as he'll give it."

"Hark!" said Bob, suddenly. "They're making a regular hubbub. Hear the bells. Look yonder, and all around. The whole country is awaking. Don't you see the watch-fires?"

"And down the road comes a party with torches and all sorts of weapons. We're done for this time, as I'm a sinner."

The drowsy beadle awoke at this, and seemed as much frightened as poor Jerry himself, at the sight of the party now approaching.

In very truth he might well be alarmed, for the new-comers were Ben Barnacle, Iron Arm, and a dozen of the most stalwart seamen of the *Firefly*.

"What's this?" demanded Ben, as he came up, holding his torch aloft, so as to light up the strange scene.

"That needs no questioning," retorted Jerry. "Can't you see it's Bob and me in the stocks?"

"How came you in this plight?" asked Iron Arm, with difficulty repressing a laugh at the comical sight which the two men presented, seated on a bench, with their legs stuck straight out before them, and their ankles held down by a solid bar of wood.

"Don't ask us how we got into it, but take us out," retorted Bob. "It was all the fault of too much English beer."

"And the captain?" asked Ben.

"Gone off across country to Lady Castlemaine's upon a very fiend of a horse."

"The whole country seems to have been aroused," continued the boatswain. "My word for it, there will be hot work this night, and blood will flow like water. There is no staying that young firebrand when once he becomes inflamed with passion."

"Here, you fat-sided old rat," exclaimed Iron Arm, seizing the beadle by the collar. "Release these men."

"Verily, good gentlemen, I could not if I would, not having the wherewithal in my possession."

"What do you mean by that, you pot-bellied idiot?"

"The keys wherewith this instrument of punishment is locked, have been carried off by my colleague in office the worthy—"

"Enough of that. Stow the rest in your jaw, it will be good for the face-ache. I have a key that will unlock it, and quickly too."

Thereupon the man seized the end of the bar in his strong fists, and, with one sturdy tug, ripped it clear of locks, hinges and screws, and threw it upon the ground.

"Now, my worthy Jacks," he said, addressing Bob and Jerry, "stir your pegs and don't let them get into such shoes again. By my veracity, if I had not made yonder instrument utterly useless for the purposes intended, I'd put our worthy friend the beadle into it, and let him sit cooling his heels for the rest of the night."

Fearing that the man might detain him in spite of this, the terrified beadle made off as quickly as his size and long-skirted coat would allow, while Ben said, addressing his comrades:

"We can do nothing here. We had best go aboard and report to the lieutenant. He may think best to run the vessel down the coast a bit."

"There will be no escape for Captain Drake in this direction," murmured Iron Arm, "for the whole country is up in arms, and there will be many waiting to intercept him."

At this moment a messenger from the ship came running up, and said, hurriedly:

The lieutenant commands you all to return with all speed to the vessel. There are warships in the harbor outside, and they are suspicious of us. Already a crew has been landed, with orders to inspect us most minutely."

"Fall in!" cried Ben, "and let us lose no time."

Then, as they made their way rapidly towards the spot where the *Firefly* lay moored, Ben, turning to his giant companion, said hurriedly:

"There is a point near the castle of this wretched woman where we can run in up to the very cliffs. Our captain knows this, and I doubt not that he will be in waiting for us at the very place."

In ten minutes they were aboard the *Firefly*, and in an indescribably short time thereafter the swift little craft ran out to sea and swept along the coast far enough out to escape all dangerous rocks and eddies, and near enough in to see any signals which might be made from shore.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Tom had made his way with all possible haste through the many secret passages of the castle, Moreland proving a true guide from very fright, and now stood outside, the first faint streaks of dawn appearing in the east.

Quickly mounting his horse, and placing Minnie upon the saddle before him, he waited until Dick had vaulted into his own saddle, and then, with a word only to the noble animal which bore him, made his way carefully down the steep descent.

As he reached the cliff a chorus of shouts, yells, and imprecations burst upon his ear.

Looking quickly in the direction whence the noise proceeded, he saw a motley crowd of peasants, country squires, and retainers, all arrayed in some fashion, rapidly making its way toward him.

"Cut down the pirate!" cried a voice in the rear of the multitude, and Tom had no difficulty in recognizing his well-intentioned cousin, both by voice and face.

"We are lost," cried Dick, as the mob approached.

"Not so," cried Tom. "Have no fear. We shall yet escape."

"We cannot retreat to the castle."

"Such is not my intention. Follow me, and all shall be well."

Urging his horse forward at the top of his speed, Tom dashed along the narrow ledge at the top of the cliff till he reached a point where it made a sheer descent to the sea.

At the bottom was a good twenty fathoms of water, and as the crowd pressed forward to capture the daring rider, what was their horror to see him turn his horse's head towards the sea, and settling deep into his saddle, urge him to make the frightful leap.

"Now, then, let him follow who dares!" cried the brave youth, and in another instant both horse and rider disappeared over the cliff, followed in an instant by Midnight Dick, while a shudder passed through the whole assembly, and many fell upon their knees in prayer.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON BOARD OF A SMUGGLER.

It was indeed a frightful leap that our hero took, and one that would have cost a less daring man his life.

He had measured the distance well, however, and knew just what his horse was capable of doing, neither urging him forward too soon or too late, but making the effort at precisely the proper moment.

Through the air went the steed, bearing Tom and his helpless burden, and striking the water at the proper angle, down they went out of sight.

The horse was terribly winded, but Tom spoke encouragingly to him, and as he breasted the waves, after rising, our hero looked about him and espied a fisherman's boat not far off.

A second splash told them that Dick had made the plunge, and successfully, too, for in a short time the man reappeared, still astride of his horse, and waving his hand, he shouted to know if Tom was all right.

Tom replied that he was, and then hailing the fisherman, asked to be taken on board his craft.

The boat was soon near enough for the man to talk to them, and as he brought it around by a pressure upon the tiller, and a slackening of the sheet, he cried:

"D'yez want to come aboard?"

"Yes," answered Tom, "and quickly, too, so throw me a line."

"De yez want the bastes on board, as well as yerselves?" he asked, with a broad Irish brogue.

"No, we will have to let the horses swim for it."

"Faix, it wur a wondherful lape yez made intoirely," answered the man, bidding one of his assistants, of whom there were two, throw Tom a line.

"There was no help for it," answered our hero, "and I would do it again, were it necessary to save this lady from her foes."

"Mebbe the leddy is yer shwateheart, thin?"

"No, she is my wife."

"An' tother mon is he yer brother?"

"No, but a kind friend."

"Ye'll have to lave the bastes now, for I daren't have them come up to the boat. They'd be thyrin' to get intil it, and we'd be swamped intoirely."

Tom then slid from the animal's back, and holding Minnie with one arm, quickly swam towards the little vessel and was taken aboard, wet and dripping to be sure, but safe and sound.

The former highwayman soon followed, and then the Irish skipper stood off from land, as already numerous boats had been launched, evidently for the purpose of intercepting the two fugitives.

There was a close, hot, snuffy little cabin on the vessel, and therein Tom carried his darling, whom he had rescued at such great danger to life and liberty.

Minnie soon recovered, Tom giving her a few drops of some rare old Irish whisky furnished him by the captain, which quite revived her, literally putting new life into her chilled frame.

The skipper was more smuggler than fisherman, if the truth were known, and it was but a short time since he had landed a cargo of silks and wines from France, and he was even now bound to Ireland for a load of whisky which had never received the government stamp.

"I know yez to be gintlemin," he said, when Tom came on deck after leaving Minnie to doff her dripping garments, "and I kin therefore trust yez."

"You can, indeed."

"Thin I'll tell yez that it's sorra a bit of a fisherman I am at all, but a rale free, thradin' gintleman."

"You need have no fear from us," answered Tom, "for we are both hunted by the blood-hounds of a tyrant. My friend will tell you who he is, but I am an American, and captain of as gallant a privateer as ever scudded over the waves."

"An Amerikin, is it? Faix, thin, I'm glad to see ye, for it's many a day that I have wished to go to that free country, and, begob, the next v'ye afther this I'll do it."

"What you do on the water I have done on land, my worthy free-trader," said Dick, with a light laugh. "I relieve the rich of their superfluous wealth, and they call me Midnight Dick."

"Faix, I've h'ard of ye, and no good have I h'ard, be the same token, but if ye're this gintleman's frind that is all I want to know."

"I am his friend, indeed, and I mean to follow him to that land that you love so well."

"To Ameriky?"

"Yes."

"An' give up robbery on the highway?"

"Yes; I have cut my last purse-string."

"Faix, then, ye're as honest as meself, an'

there's me hand to show I meant ye no offence be phat I might have said the now."

"Since none was intended, none was taken," said Dick, gallantly.

"Ye wouldn't mind takin' a run over to th' Oirish coast, wud ye, now?" asked the skipper, "bekase it's there that I'm goin', barrin' no ugly bosthoon of a excise officer shtops me. The coast guarrud wur abroad the night, they tell me, and I meself seen the rockets."

"That demonstration was made upon my account," answered Tom. "However, I do not think that I can go to Ireland. I must rejoin my ship."

"Where might she be lyin', sur?"

"Down the coast a bit. I have an idea that my lieutenant has been obliged to leave, but he knows where I am, and will doubtless look for me."

"Faix, thin, he'll have to foind ye soon, for there's bad weather comin' up, and I daren't stay hereabout."

Tom scanned the horizon eagerly for any signs of the *Firefly*, but saw none, the thick mist having suddenly closed in all about them, and the waves being tossed about in a manner which made the little vessel, stanch as she was, a most perilous abiding place.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TOM TAKES COMMAND OF THE SMUGGLER—A CHASE.

THE skipper put right out to sea, as the open water was safer at such a time than the coast, where they might easily be wrecked.

Among other stores which the little vessel carried were several handsome dresses, which the captain had bought in France, and which he was taking to ladies of fashion who did not care to pay the customs charges, but were willing to pay the honest skipper twice their value, for the sake of having them smuggled over.

The skipper offered one of these to Tom, saying that if it was a bit rumpled when the lady for whom it was intended got it, he could say that he had had to fight for it, and that that would enhance its value.

"I am afraid that we shall have to take a trip to Ireland, after all," said Tom to his friend, "for I do not care to run this good-natured fellow into danger on my account, and by the time this mist lifts we shall be half-way across the channel."

The fog presently grew so dense, however, that the skipper was obliged to drop anchor, and wait for it to clear up, and in the interim the two passengers, with the captain and mate, amused themselves in the cabin by playing whist.

The fog lifted a little toward night, though not sufficiently so to allow them to proceed, and now a new danger appeared.

There was a strong breeze blowing in-shore, and the little craft, dragging her anchor, threatened to run upon the rocks.

It was just dusk, and all hands were very much excited, the skipper having determined to put to sea, at all risks, when a pale, blue light was seen to shoot up into the air from a cliff about a hundred rods away.

It hung poised in the air for about half a minute, and then faded, a pale, green light taking its place upon the instant, and hovering above the water for a short time, as the other had done.

"Begorrah! that manes that the coast guaruds is expected," muttered the Celt. "Bear a hand, Mickey and Brian, and help me get up th' anchor."

"Whatever assistance we can give you, you are welcome to," said Tom. "Shall I take the helm?"

"Yis, an' ye have a mind to, for, be the howly piper, I fear that mischief's a brewin'. Be gob! I'm right, look at that!"

At that moment a bright red star shot up from the cliff, and shedding a lurid light over the waters for the space of a minute, fell into the sea with a loud splash.

"Bear a hand, ye gossoons," said the captain, working like a beaver. "Sure, the guaruds is upon us, this mortil minute. Dinny, on the hill beyant, has seed 'em, and knows that I must be in it, and is givin' me warnin'."

Boom!

A dull report sounded through the fog which was now lifting, immediately preceded by a flash and a puff of smoke.

"Howld hard to the tiller and rin her straight for the say, whin I gi' ye the wurrud," said the smuggler to Tom. "Ye're a gintleman born, an' I knows I cu'd trist yez."

"Lively there, then," cried the late highwayman, springing to the assistance of the three men, "for yonder, not two ship lengths, I can see the cutter of the coast guards, through the fog. I know the gentry well, and more than one brush have I had with them."

"Oh, Tom, there is danger; you will be captured!" cried Minnie, coming on deck at this moment.

"Danger, yes; captured by those fellows, never! Ah! is she up? Then bear a hand and trim those sheets a bit! Aha, that does it. Don't trim them too flat, or we'll be driven on shore."

"Begob, it's the foine sailor ye are, and a better Murty Maguire niver saw in his loife," said the skipper, allowing Tom to take the lead entirely, and obeying his orders promptly and exactly as they were given.

Boom!

Another flash, and another report, and as the shot speeds across the water, narrowly missing the little craft, a stentorian voice is heard crying:

"Stop, you rascally smugglers, or I'll blow you into ten thousand pieces!"

"Begorrah! we c'uldn't do it if ye war to make it eliven thousand," answered Maguire. "Kape her till it, darlin'," he added, addressing Tom; "faix, ye're making her go beautiful."

"Haul up, I say!" yelled the coast officer again; "it's not you I want, but the two men you have on board. One's the captain of a Yankee privateer and the other a highwayman. You may go free, but I must have those men."

"Faix, an' if they were the apostle Pater and his grandfather ye couldn't have thim," retorted the skipper. "Luff a little, darlint," he added to Tom. "Ye're doin' sphenid, but I knows me vessel a bit better than you, ye know, and undershtand her whims. She's a bit cross-eyed, and ye has to give the tiller a bit more lee-way than ye think ye are to make her go straight."

Tom soon got used to the little vessel's "whims," and before long he had carried her quite out of the reach of the cutter's guns, and was speeding straight out to sea, or as nearly so as possible with the head wind which she was forced to meet.

By degrees the wind blew the mist away, and then the cutter was observed signaling to some vessel at a distance, but hidden behind a point of rocks.

"They are speaking some war vessel," muttered Tom, "and acquainting her with my presence. Aha! were I upon my own deck now, I would not run from these braggarts. Where can the *Firefly* be all this time? If she would but come up now, I would not give a rush for all their frigates."

Then, heading as close to the wind as he dared, Tom sent the little vessel fairly flying through the water, leaving her larger pursuer far behind, as though they had been becalmed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TOM IN IRELAND—THE VILLAIN AT WORK.

"SAFE upon the shores of the Emerald Isle at last!"

"Begorrah we are, and it's to ye intoirely that I owe it, me bould American."

These words were uttered by Tom and the smuggler captain as they stepped upon shore, the little schooner having made a safe, though very rough, passage, meeting with no enemies, though constantly buffeted by the waves, and more than once in imminent peril.

To Tom's efforts the skipper and his crew, indeed, owed their lives, for, but for his experience in handling a vessel, they would have been wrecked a dozen times in making the run across the channel.

It was nearly night when they landed, not far from the beautiful bay of Cork, and, dropping anchor in a little inlet, where, sheltered by rocks and cliffs, the smuggler was not liable to meet with discovery, the skipper had lowered a boat and gone on shore at once, accompanied by the two friends and Minnie.

Tom found a neat cottage not far away, where his wife could remain in safety, and then, accompanied by Dick, he sought the coast and spent hours in running up and down, keeping a lookout for his vessel.

In the early morning he espied her, bearing close in to the coast; her well-known outlines he clearly distinguished, there being no doubt as to her identity.

Tom at once put out in a boat, and in less than an hour had the joy of once more treading the quarter-deck of his own beautiful *Firefly*.

"How did you know I had come over to Ireland?" he asked Harry Vere. "I was afraid I'd miss you and have a long search."

Harry then told his young captain how he had sailed for the cliffs near the residence of Lady Castlemaine, but being delayed by the fog, had missed finding him, adding to this the following:

"I came across a former highwayman, who told me of the gallant leap which you and his old leader had made from the cliff. He himself was

obliged to fly, but had watched you board the smuggler, and had assisted in giving the signals which showed you the presence of the cutter.

"I met her myself afterwards, and had a lively brush with her, sinking her in very sight of a large frigate which was in chase of me.

"I ran up the Yankee colors, and scudded away for Cork, trusting to find you somewhere in this neighborhood, but not thinking to find you so soon."

"We must run further up the coast," said Tom, "and then I will go across and get Minnie."

"That will be the wisest plan, for the frigate will follow us and give news of the smuggler, whose whereabouts are known, so that it will not be safe for us to remain on this part of the coast any longer than necessary."

"I will run right up into the Bay of Cork in the guise of a merchantman, and in the city I may get news that it will be well for me to know."

That night Tom's vessel lay in one of the most secluded spots to be found, and Tom himself, in company with Ben and Vere, was in the city seeking information, but finding little.

The next day, however, he heard the news of the arrival of an English war vessel, and discovered also, that his presence in the neighborhood was known, from the general posting of a notice, offering one thousand pounds reward for his capture dead or alive.

He did not know that it was owing to Reuben's watchfulness and bitter animosity, that this last affair had come about, but so it was, and not only was the traitor aiming at Tom's life, but at that of Minnie also.

Reuben hated his gallant cousin with a most malignant and deadly hatred, and was determined to attack him upon every side, in his affections, his pride, his honor, and at every point which he considered vulnerable.

For instance, Tom was declared a pirate, when he was a commissioned officer in the service of his country; the associate of highwaymen and thieves; a pillager of private dwellings, also accomplice of smugglers and a disturber of the public peace.

Rewards of a less amount were offered for the arrest of any one connected with the young captain, whether officer or seaman, or even those who had given him assistance in any way, although without knowing who he was.

Tom was in the coffee-room of an inn, accompanied by Vere and Ben, when he saw this notice, but as all were in disguise, they did not fear detection.

"It will be as well to get away from here," suggested Tom, "for there is nothing of special interest to detain us. I should indeed like to have an encounter with the frigate, and perhaps I shall, but first of all I must get Minnie safely on board my vessel."

"Shall you go over to where she is?" asked Ben.

"No, but send a faithful messenger, who will accompany her hither. Do you get a good man, Ben, and I will write Minnie a note."

Now it happened that right behind where Tom sat was a secret apartment, not much bigger than a closet provided with loop-holes and contrivances for both seeing and hearing all that took place in the room.

Snugly ensconced in this secret place was the arch villain, Reuben Harpy, himself, having been long waiting for an opportunity to ensnare Tom.

He could now compass his wishes, but first he must secure Minnie, and here was his opportunity.

While Tom was writing the note which would bring his wife to him, Reuben wrote another, being an adept at forging, and being able to imitate Tom's handwriting so well that no one but the young man himself could have detected the cheat.

Then he secured the services of two murderous villains whom he well knew, and who would commit any crime for the sake of a few pounds, and put them upon the track of Tom's messenger.

Night had set in when Minnie Drake, waiting in the peasant's cabin for some news of her husband, was handed the following letter, which she perused with the greatest eagerness:

"DEAR WIFE,—I am hunted down, and am obliged to seek safety in the mountains. Come to the Devil's Basin at midnight, and we will make our escape. The bearer of this will accompany you. He can be trusted. Say nothing to any one else, as I fear treachery. TOM."

"The Devil's Basin!" thought Minnie. "I have heard them tell of that place. It is a wild spot, and crimes have been committed there before now, but if Tom wishes I will go anywhere."

Crimes had been committed there indeed, and if Reuben Harpy were not frustrated in time,

the Devil's Basin would witness another tragedy before morning.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE DEVIL'S BASIN.

AN hour after Tom had given the messenger his note for Minnie, while he and Vere were sitting alone in their private room at the tavern, Iron Arm suddenly entered in a state of great excitement.

"You are betrayed, captain," he cried. "Some villain has informed upon you, and a file of soldiers are at this moment marching down the street to arrest you."

"Lock the door, and hold it against all comers while I make my escape. Then follow, and if you are in danger my men will help you out."

The huge gunner locked and barred the door, while Tom and Harry instantly decamped by the window, leaping lightly to the ground, and seeking shelter at once.

Vere dropped down the well at Tom's instance, waiting there to watch the officers, but Tom walked boldly out into the street, actually saluting the officer as the men passed by, and making room for them by stepping into a doorway.

This boldness alone saved him, for notwithstanding that the officer thought he recognized his man, he was convinced from Tom's free manner that such could not be the case.

Tom did not wait for him to change his mind, however, but darted into the house, where, to his surprise, he met Dick engaged in conversation with a beautiful young lady.

"I fear we are betrayed, captain," said the man, "and I have just sent your gunner to warn you. Ben has gone for a car and fresh disguises, and will be here in a moment."

"Then it was lucky that I came in here," said Tom, "as otherwise we might not have met."

"Follow me at once," said Dick. "There is a lane back of this house, at the end of which we will find our men."

"But Vere and the gunner. They are at the tavern."

"I will send my maid to them," said the young lady. "You can trust me, sir, for Dick is my own brother."

"Then let us go at once," said Tom, and without further delay, they hurried through the house and down the lane, where they found Ben waiting with a car, and the disguises of peasants.

Assuming these, they drove away, avoiding the principal streets as much as possible, and yet not seeming to care whether they were followed or not.

They drove out towards the country, having been joined by Vere, and night had just begun to fall, when, what was Tom's surprise to see his messenger come running down the road, covered with dust and blood.

"What has happened?" asked Tom, and then for the first time the messenger recognized him.

"Arrah, captain, darlint," he gasped, "there's mischief to pay, and the devil and all is in it."

"Speak, man, what has happened?"

"Faix, I have been set upon by a murderin' hound called Black Dan, and him and a colleague of his named Red Murtagh, hev gon' to the leddy, wid a lyin' message, biddin' her hie at wanst to the Devil's Basin."

"The Devil's Basin!" said Dick. "I know the place well, and the evil reputation it bears."

"They thought they'd killed me," continued the man, "but I follied them, and heard the message they gave. Black Dan is goin' to tak' the leddy to the place, and Murtagh is to meet some wan ilse there, and together they will pit the poor craythure out av the way."

"How far is this?" asked Tom with breathless excitement.

"Three miles," said Dick, "and the road is the wildest one in all Ireland. It is infested with robbers, and is too rough for a cart to traverse."

"We must hasten then. Can we reach there in time?"

"Perhaps, but we will be obliged to go on foot."

They at once dismounted, and made all haste toward the ill-spoken neighborhood of the Devil's Basin, a wild ravine through which a turbulent stream made its way, being the outlet or a deep pool which was fed by a torrent that leaped from the crags at one end of the ravine.

At the base of the crags lay the pool, dark and turbid, the waters at the center forever boiling and tumbling and drawing down to their slimy depths whatever was thrown or fell into them.

People had been murdered before now, at the top of the crag, and their bodies thrown into the whirling stream, where, finding their way to the

pool below, a veritable Devil's Basin, they had been drawn down and never more recovered.

Huge rocks and boulders, gray and moss-grown, were strewn about the place, a narrow path leading to the top, where a frail wooden bridge spanned the stream as it leaped from the crag.

Near the edge of the pool grew a cypress, which, partly uprooted, hung over the dark waters, its branches festooned with long, creeping vines, which hung within a few feet of the whirlpool.

The trees above grew so thick, and the place itself was so hidden and obscure, that it was always dark here, except when the sun or moon were directly overhead, and even then the light was filtered through the leaves, and never fully illumined the scene, the very center of the pool being the only part that was ever in full light.

To this weird scene came poor Minnie, guided by the villain whom Reuben Harpy had hired to do his dirty work, and, though strangely impressed by the desolateness of the place, she feared nothing, because she expected to meet her beloved husband.

"I see no one," she said, as she reached the top of the crag by the little bridge. "What a fearful place this is. Where is my husband? Did he not say that he would be waiting?"

"Yis, me leddy, but he might be a bit late. The sogers has been huntin' him lively this night, and it's tin to wan if he don't hev a rin fur it."

At that moment there was a sharp whistle heard, and a cloaked form suddenly appeared from the bushes upon the other side of the rude bridge.

Minnie darted forward, expecting to clasp her husband in her arms, when, as she reached the middle of the bridge, the figure suddenly threw aside his cloak and in the moonlight stood revealed.

It was not Captain Tom, but Reuben Harpy, his face inflamed with evil passions, and a low mocking laugh escaping from his lips.

"What does this mean?" cried Minnie, in accents of terror.

"That you have come to your death!" hissed Reuben, and taking one swift stride forward, he seized the affrighted girl in his arms and hurled her into the stream, which quickly bore her, vainly crying for help, towards the fatal pool.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TOM'S ADVENTURE IN THE WOOD.

THROUGH the tangled underbrush went Tom and his friends, now clambering over fallen trees, now climbing up steep ascents, and then leaping from rock to rock where a single misstep would have been fatal.

Along the dreary road, which could hardly be called a path, they made their way as rapidly as possible, while the time flew by at an alarming rate, every instant's delay being perilous.

Once they came upon a cabin hidden among the rocks, when Tom and Dick, who were in advance of their comrades, were suddenly set upon by four ruffians armed with bludgeons, who demanded their valuables.

Tom quickly whipped out his sword and laid open the face of one of the cut-throats, Dick running a second through the body with his sword.

Ben and Vere, hearing the noise of the struggle, ran hastily off, when the robbers were suddenly reinforced by half a dozen villainous-looking fellows, some with shot-guns and some with bludgeons.

"Down wid the spies!" yelled one of the outlaws. "We'll hev no meddlin' wid an honest man's thrade. Murder the bastes an' trow dem down the glen!"

"Not so fast!" cried Dick, seizing the villain by the throat. "I know you, Lanty Monahan. You're a black-hearted thief, and you once betrayed me to the magistrates."

"Begor, it's Masther Dick," cried the man; "the gentleman robber. Faix, that were on'y a bit of merriment. I meant no harrum at all, darlint."

"Then here's another bit to remember me by," cried Dick, and he hurled the murderous wretch down the steep bank, where he lay groaning and calling for help, it being a mercy that his back had not been broken.

Vere had transfixed another of the ruffians, and Ben had brained a third with his own cudgel, and sent a fourth to follow Lanty at the bottom of the glen, so that when Dick rejoined Tom, the footpads concluded that the country was becoming too hot for them, and began to make away at full speed.

They quickly disappeared in the bushes, and though they fired a few shots at our friends from behind trees and rocks, they were fortunately without effect.

Tom and the others made haste to get away from the dangerous neighborhood, however, as they could not tell what might happen, and there was no time to be lost, the encounter with the ruffians having already delayed them.

Half an hour later, a withered old hag, having a stout, uprooted sapling for a staff, suddenly appeared in the path before them, and pointing her long, skinny forefinger at Tom, croaked, in discordant tones:

"Ye're young and brave, my child, but tak' heed o' an ould woman's warnin'. I've h'ard the owl shriek thrice the night, and just now a vinomous toad hopped betwixt me and the sthrame. I saw ye in my dhramas three nights, an' the evil spell is upon ye. Turn back, for there's death in the path!"

"Stand aside, woman!" cried Tom, impetuously. "I have no time to listen to your nonsense."

"Beware!" cried the hag. "The curse is hanging over your head, and will fall, if you do not heed my words. I read your doom in the stars. Turn back and be saved, or be the powers above—"

"Now then, mother, step aside, and don't bother honest gentlemen," said Dick, taking the creature by the arm and putting her aside.

Then all four dashed ahead, the harsh cries of the angry seeress coming faintly after them as they sped away through the tangled thicket.

"Could she have known of the treachery," said Tom, "and have been placed here on purpose to intercept and turn us from our path?"

"Oh, no!" answered Dick. "She is honest enough, but a trifle crazed. She often gives prophetic warnings, but I never heard that any harm came from disregarding them."

"I don't like to think that perhaps she may have been right, and that we had better have heeded her," mused Tom. "I am not superstitious, but I have frequently been warned against danger in as strange a manner, and I have always obeyed the warning."

"Pshaw!" cried Dick. "This is but a harmless old hag who can neither harm nor benefit you. Think no more about it. It is now close upon midnight, and we have some distance yet to go."

This brought Tom to himself once more, and he dismissed the old woman and her frantic warning entirely from his mind.

Minnie was in danger, and all other thoughts gave way before that, and now nothing could turn him aside.

Up hill and down, through brook and briar, over rock and bank, up steep inclines and across level stretches of country, hurried the little party. Dick in advance, as the guide, and Tom following close behind.

"Hark!" cried Vere of a sudden, pausing as a strange, unearthly sound broke upon the stillness.

"'Tis but the hoot of an owl," said Dick pressing forward.

"No, no!" cried Tom, now pausing. "It is a cry of distress."

"'Tis but the scream of a night bird. Haste, man. We cannot pause to listen to every sound that greets us in the forest. You are nervous, distracted, and give way too much to foolish fears. The wood is not your element I plainly see. Upon the broad ocean you would be another man."

They pressed on faster than ever, and presently when Dick announced that they were close to the Devil's Basin, a piercing scream awoke the echoes far and wide, followed immediately by a terrified cry for help.

"It is she!" cried Tom. "She's in peril. Forward, and may Heaven aid us now!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ADVENTURE AT THE POOL.

In another moment Tom was on the left bank of the torrent overlooking the pool, and about ten feet below the falls.

The path led along a narrow ledge, and taking the first turning he had come out upon a sort of shelf which overhung the dark waters.

The full rays of the moon struck the center of the mad pool below him, and there, whirled around and around by the eddying waters, was the form of his darling wife.

Her face was turned towards him now, and her white arms uplifted for help, while from her pale, bloodless lips came that piteous appeal for help.

In another moment Tom would have leaped into the pool, had not Dick seized him around the waist and forcibly detained him.

"What would you do, man?" he cried in terror; "would you lose your own life as well as hers?"

"Detain me not," cried Tom, in accents of despair. "I cannot see her perish before my eyes. Unhand me, I say."

"Help! Help!" called the struggling girl from the midst of the whirling eddies.

Tom shook off the detaining grasp of his friend and leaped straight out from the ledge.

Into the boiling, surging waters to meet death face to face with his beloved wife?

Not so.

We have spoken of the cypress with its festoons of creeping vines which stretched across the water almost to the opposite bank.

Tom sprang out, not down, and as he leaped he caught the strong, closely-entwined stems of the hanging vines.

They swayed back and forth for a moment under his weight, and then the tree from which they depended bent down under this new burden placed upon it.

It bent far over; and Tom looking down as he clung to the vine with hands and feet, saw that the ends of the creepers touched the water of the pool.

Sliding down the rope of twisted vines by one hand and foot, he reached a point directly over the center of the eddy.

His foot touched the water, but at that moment Minnie was whirled close within his grasp.

Clutching his support with the tenacity of death, he reached down, grasped the poor girl around the body just under the arms, and drew her to him with a frantic cry for joy.

She was saved, and at the very moment when death seemed inevitable.

There was danger still, however, that Tom might slip from the vines into the pool, or thus breaking under the combined weight put upon them, let their living burden down into the water.

Vere had come to the rescue, and dashing down the bank to the bottom of the ravine, crossed over, and climbing along the tree, reached down and drew the vines toward him.

Tom, now bidding Minnie grasp him firmly around the shoulders, so that he would have both hands free, now began climbing up, hand over hand, and with Vere's assistance soon clambered into the tree.

It bent frightfully under the combined weight of the three, being not much more than a sapling, and an ominous crack now sounded at the roots.

Vere hastened back with all possible speed and dropped to the ground, thus relieving the tree of considerable weight, but it was already strained beyond its powers, and its destruction seemed certain.

Tom hurried along the projecting limb, from which the vines depended, towards the main trunk, and then dropped Minnie into Vere's arms, the latter waiting below to receive her.

Our hero then descended himself, and not a bit too soon, for the cypress, weakened at its roots and loosening a large stone which had helped to support it, now sent the latter crashing into the pool, and in another moment followed itself, though at less speed.

"Saved," cried Tom. "Ah, this has been a night of adventure indeed."

"But why did you send for me to come to this wild place?" asked Minnie of her husband, as he clasped her to his heart.

"I did not. Tell me, dearest, who was the traitor that placed you in such peril?"

"Your cousin Reuben."

"Ah, the black-hearted ruffian! I thought I recognized his hand in this. When next I meet him let him beware."

Then wrapping his long cloak about the form of his wife lest she should be chilled by the night air, Tom bade his faithful friend Dick lead the way back to the coast.

"Perils yet beset us," he said, "and I know not if we shall escape the many dangers that surround us."

"Once upon the sea you can laugh your enemies to scorn."

"Aye, but we are not upon the sea yet, so hasten my good friend, and lose not a moment on the way."

"If I could find the wretched hirelings whom Reuben Harpy got to assist him in this foul night's work," muttered Ben as they hastened back towards the town, "I would split them from head to heel."

"They have doubtless fled," said Harry Vere, "though they could not have been very far away when we arrived at the pool."

Nothing was seen of them or of Reuben, and no further incidents occurred during the return to the town, which they did not reach until nearly daybreak.

Then they were met by Jerry Mizzen, who reported that the true character of their vessel was suspected, and that within a short time she would be visited by an armed party from the

frigate lying near, which had already covered her with her guns.

"Then we must be off," cried Tom, hurrying towards the shore, "and as for catching us, let them try it if they will."

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER GLORIOUS VICTORY.

THE sun was just rising, its first beams gilding the dancing waves as the *Firefly* sped away to sea.

Close behind was the frigate, evidently determined on capture, every sail set and all hands ready for action.

One or two shots were fired, and Tom answered them, running up his colors in defiance, and waving his hat saucily as he stood upon the quarter deck.

"Come on!" he shouted. "We'll give you all the fun you want."

Half an hour later, when he had got well into the open water, he electrified all hands by crying:

"Now then, all hands to 'bout ship. Boat-swains, pipe all hands to quarters. I'm going to have a tussle with this fellow and prove who is the better man."

A tremendous shout rent the air, and then Ben Barmore began giving the necessary orders, in a voice that could be heard distinctly in all parts of the ship.

The orders were quickly obeyed, and then, to the astonishment of the British frigate, the *Firefly* was observed bearing down upon her under full sail.

That the pursued should suddenly become the pursuer, the assailed the assailant, was almost too much for them, and they had not yet recovered from their surprise, when the *Firefly* poured in a deadly broadside.

They replied in good earnest, but the armored sides of the gallant little cruiser threw off the rain of iron and steel which rattled against them as though it had been nothing more hurtful than so many musket balls.

"Now then!" roared Iron Arm, as he directed a shot at the enemy's main rigging.

Down upon them came the *Firefly*, pouring in shot after shot, broadside after broadside, the Englishman retaliating, until the air was so thick with the sulphurous smoke that nothing could be seen, and a cessation of the firing became absolutely necessary.

Tom had taken his bearings, however, with the utmost nicety, and he continued to urge on his ship, pouring in a deadly rain upon the other vessel, although he could see nothing until a sudden crash told him that the two had collided.

"Upon them!" he shouted, leaping forward, and though his brave lads were fairly blinded by the stifling smoke which enveloped everything, they leaped upon the Briton's decks and cut down all who opposed them.

"Are you flends, or what?" cried the commander. "Do you not see that I have surrendered?"

"How!" cried Tom, at these words. "Let not another blow be struck!"

Then, as the smoke began to clear away, he advanced to the quarter-deck, and said politely:

"I wish you a very good-morning, sir, and congratulate you on the brave defense you have made. You must admit, however, that the Yankees are invincible, whether at home or abroad."

"Whether this may be true or not, in general, you certainly seem to be," replied the other, with deep mortification. "Lieutenant, hand the gentleman my sword."

"Tell your superior," cried Tom, the hot blood mounting to his cheeks, "that I will not take his sword from any one but himself."

"I will teach this insolent fellow better manners," he muttered, between his teeth, and then, giving Harry Vere a glance of deep meaning, he awaited the conquered captain's pleasure.

The latter, with ill-concealed chagrin, stepped forward and handed his sword to Captain Tom.

The latter, quickly stepping aside, made a motion to Harry Vere, who quickly advanced and took the sword.

"This is an insult, sir," cried the irate Englishman, turning crimson up the very roots of his hair, and trembling with passion.

"Anything would be a courtesy to an officer who has already shown such a want of good feeling and such an entire ignorance of etiquette," replied Tom. "Lieutenant, let the boatswain conduct the prisoners to our vessel," he added, determined to punish the man's arrogance.

The vanquished captain saw that his young conqueror had him at a disadvantage, and he wisely concluded to give up any further attempts to show his spite.

He and the officers and crew of the vessel were marched between a double line of sailors aboard the *Firefly*, and then Tom drew off as the other ship was already on fire and fast settling down in the water.

His victory had been a signal one, for it had been accomplished right within sight of the shore, and in the enemy's own stronghold, as it might be.

The defeated vessel was left drifting idly upon the tide, and the gallant, saucy little *Firefly* sped away with all sails set, looking as though she were the winner in some regatta, and not as if she had just come off the victor in one of the hardest fights that had ever been seen in those parts.

It was a crushing defeat for the Englishman to be captured and his vessel destroyed in sight of his own shores, and he thought he would never get over the disgrace.

There was nothing for it but to submit to fate, however; and in future he was less arrogant, being forced to admit that the Yankees were worthy of even his steel, and more vigorous fighters than he had fancied.

Away went the *Firefly* towards the English coast, for Tom had not done with his enemies, and meant to punish them so that they would never dare plot against him again.

As the white sails of his noble ship faded from sight, the English vessel blew up with a loud report, and was scattered over the face of the waters, thus depriving the enemy of even the cold comfort of saving a defeated ship from wreck.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

A MONTH and more has passed, and Tom has been fairly raking the English coast, sinking or otherwise destroying every British craft that he has met.

Cruisers have been sent out after him, but the daring boy has escaped from under their very guns, and continues to harass the merchant marine, being resolved to do as much mischief as lies in his power.

He darts about from place to place like the firefly he is, and no one knows where he is going to turn up next, so sudden are his many appearances—now here, now hundreds of miles away, and then back again in a twinkling, almost.

Tom has never met with Reuben, although he has more than once been on shore, and he is not satisfied until he can encounter this wretch, and once for all put an end to his career of crime.

After having annoyed them to such a degree as to materially cripple the local mercantile trade, Tom determined to strike one last blow, and then speed away to other scenes.

Running his vessel in one night, under cover of thick darkness, for there were two or three cruisers out in search of him, Tom made his way to the abode of Lady Castlemaine, to which the owner had returned, as he had been informed.

Giving orders to his subordinates, he advanced boldly up to the very gates, and demanded to see the traitress.

He was admitted, and asked to await her ladyship's coming in a little anteroom.

He had been there for about ten minutes when a man entered whom at first he thought he did not know.

Voice, gesture, bearing, everything seemed strange, until of a sudden he caught sight of his entertainer's hand, which until then he had kept carefully concealed, although with no evident effort at concealment.

"It is you, then!" he cried, leaping to his feet, and drawing his sword. "I would know that scarred hand again, were I to see it in Egypt!"

The man was Reuben Harpy, who until this moment had completely hidden his identity from him.

"It is I, indeed!" cried Reuben, resuming his natural voice. "You are nicely caught, Captain Tom."

"If I am then your life shall pay the forfeit. Draw, villain, and defend yourself."

"With all my heart."

"But, first, before I kill you, I must see Lady Castlemaine."

At this moment an attendant entered and said: "My lady awaits you in the grand hall."

"Lead on," said Tom, and then giving way for Reuben, that he might not follow him, he made his way to the place where Lady Castlemaine was in waiting.

This was a large hall or drawing-room, the appointments of which were most sumptuous.

Around the walls, at a height of about ten feet, were large panels, into which were set the family portraits, there being at least twenty of them, all done by famous artists.

Below were niches and alcoves at frequent intervals, these being hung with heavy tapestry,

representing scenes of the chase, battles and pastoral scenes, being all of most excellent design and workmanship.

As Tom and Reuben entered, the lady arose and bowing gracefully, though with the utmost hauteur, said with freezing civility:

"To what do I owe the honor of this second visit, Captain Drake?"

"To my desire for justice and retribution. I have a demand to make."

"Request, would be a better word."

"Not to you. I come not here to bandy compliments, but to demand, not request, a confession from you, giving the full particulars of your late dastardly attempt upon the life, honor and fortune of my wife."

"You forget that you are in my castle, where I can summon aid at any moment, and punish your rash presumptions."

"You have writing materials then, I see," replied Tom, paying no attention to this haughty speech. "Write what I dictate."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I will tear this den of infamy down about your ears."

"We shall see," she replied coldly, and then nodded to Reuben.

"You are caught, Tom Drake," the latter said, with a laugh. "While the lady has kept you waiting, I have been preparing a reception for you. Behold!"

He suddenly clapped his hands and took two strides to the large fire-place, at one side of the room.

Instantly the tapestry concealing the alcoves was thrown aside, and two score armed retainers leaped into the room.

"Upon him!" yelled Reuben, "and cut him to pieces!"

"Not yet!" cried a voice, and from the fire-place sprang brave Ben Barmore, sword in hand. "To the rescue!" he shouted, and then suddenly putting his boatswain's pipe to his lips he blew a shrill blast.

In an instant a startling event took place.

Every one of those painted panels slid back, and in the opening thus displayed were seen Captain Tom's gallant crew.

Every one of them was crowded with faces, and a hundred muskets glistened in the light of the hanging lamps, their yawning muzzles being pointed at the armed hirelings below.

"Do his bidding!" thundered Ben, "or I shall order those brave lads up yonder to fire!"

"What shall I write?" asked Lady Castlemaine, turning pale.

"What I have said."

She hastily wrote a few lines, signed them, dusted the sand-box over the paper, and handed it to Tom.

Our hero glanced over the paper, folded and put it into his breast, and then said:

"It is sufficient."

"Now away with you," cried Ben, and putting his arm through Tom's he hurried towards the fire-place, where there was a secret door.

It was open, and Reuben and Harpy had suddenly disappeared.

"Never mind," cried Ben. "I know another way out. Follow me, my brave lads."

Then he dashed out with Tom, the panels were again closed, and in half an hour afterwards Captain Tom was upon the deck of the *Firefly*, surrounded by his faithful crew, and leaving England far behind.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BIG SEA EMERALD APPEARS ONCE MORE.

"WHAT sort of place do you make it out to be, Jerry?"

"An island, sir, but I don't think it's inhabited."

"Are there any signs of water there?"

"I should think so, sir, for there are trees, and yonder, in the little cove, is what looks like a stream running from in-shore."

"Put in closer, Harry, and we'll send a boat ashore with casks."

The *Firefly* had run down the African coast, and they were now in sight of a small island, where Captain Tom determined to land.

He was in need of water, and as this would be the best place of any to lay in a supply of that most necessary article, he resolved to send a boat or two ashore and give his men a chance to run around a bit.

When the vessel was brought within a mile of the little island, the anchor was dropped, the sails lowered and two boats launched, Tom himself being seated in one.

The signs did not prove false, for there was water in abundance on the island, and of a very fine quality.

A number of casks had been brought, and

while the men were filling these, Tom went off for a tour of the island, accompanied by Dick, the former highwayman, and Iron Arm.

Orders had been given to send to the ship for all the empty casks they had on board, as Tom thought it as well to make the most of a good thing, and their stay on the island would be considerably lengthened in consequence.

The men were glad enough for the chance to stretch their legs after being so long aboard ship and the work on hand was made to last as long as possible.

Two hours and more had passed when Tom and his companions, emerging from the trees upon the opposite side of the island, came suddenly upon a singular-looking creature sitting upon the beach under the shadow of a bank.

He was so greatly engrossed with something or other that he did not observe the approach of our friends, and Iron Arm was about to speak, when Tom suddenly clutched his hand and signalled for him to keep silent.

"Ha! ha! how it glistens," he was saying. "It is mine, all mine, and I shall be king of the island, and wear it in my crown."

At a signal from Tom all three dropped noiselessly to the ground, and making their way silently to the verge of the bank, gazed cautiously down upon the maniac, for such in very truth he seemed.

He was nearly naked, such clothes as he had being in rags, and totally unfit to shield him from the rude blast, had not the island been situated in a warm latitude.

His hair was matted and unkempt, his nails long and sharp, like the talons of a bird, and his whole appearance denoted utter want and misery.

His arms and legs were covered with short black hair; his feet and head were bare; his loins girded with the skin of some wild animal, and his back barely covered with an old military coat.

He had something in his hand, which he gazed at with the profoundest admiration, now uttering the most unintelligible gibberish, and then talking with evident understanding.

"Ha! ha! it is mine at last!" he cried, with a loud and discordant laugh, such as only one crazed could utter. "It is mine, and I am king! What a beautiful color it has—bold green, like the sea under the sunlight, and then as red as blood."

"Good Heavens! what can the mad creature mean?" thought Tom.

"'Tis a priceless gem," continued the maniac, "and is worth a king's ransom. And now it is mine, yes, mine, and I am the king of all this splendid domain. None dare dispute my rights, and I shall wear this glorious gem in the center of my crown of gold."

Tom leaned forward, and, looking over the demented one's shoulder, caught a glimpse of the object of his admiration.

It was an emerald, as large as a bird's egg, and shone with a fire that was as baleful as it was dazzling.

It was that fateful gem, the sea emerald.

It was that accursed stone with the stain of blood upon it, the desire to possess which had brought death to so many.

Tom recognized it in a moment, and drew back with a shudder.

Dick leaned forward, and catching a glimpse of the beautiful, yet terrible jewel, cried excitedly.

"By the riches of Ophir! What a wondrous jewel! Would that it were—"

"Beware how you covert that accursed stone!" cried Tom, in deadly terror, "for that wish may be your death."

"But why should I not have it? This senseless idiot cannot know its value. Would that it were mine indeed!"

Alas for the luckless man! He has spoken the wish, the desire for the sea emerald has entered his heart and he is doomed from that instant.

The maniac, aroused by the sound of voices, now sprang to his feet, and seeing our friends, sped away with the swiftness of the wind, laughing and gibbering like the insane creature he was.

"I will have it yet!" cried Dick, and before either of the men could stop him, he was hurrying after the maniac at full speed.

Had Tom looked upon the jewel then, he would have seen that its luster was dimmed by a blood-red cloud, which spread over all its facets, and made it appear like a mass of clotted gore!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CURSE STILL FOLLOWS THE SEA EMERALD.

AWAY sped the maniac and after him, fleet-footed, followed Dick, the desire to possess the emerald taking full possession of him.

With the desire came the utter contempt of the means to be taken for the accomplishment of his end, and now, so far from cajoling the gem away from its possessor, as was his first intention, the shedding of blood would be nothing to him. He was mad, infatuated, and nothing but the possession of the blood-cursed jewel would satisfy his insane desires.

Drawing a pistol, he leveled it at the flying maniac and fiend.

Crack!

Ping!

Thud!

The sharp, whip-like report, the whistle of the winged messenger of death, and the dull sound of a falling body.

The bullet has been true to its aim and the poor unfortunate lies dead, the baleful gem clutched tightly in his fingers.

"By Heaven, it is a sin that this accursed jewel should remain in the world to move men to such awful crimes," cried Tom. "Would that it were forever buried in the depths of the sea."

"Look there!" cried Iron Arm. "We are not the only persons upon the island. Others have come here besides ourselves."

The truth of this remark was at once apparent.

Through an opening in a belt of trees which extended nearly to the water's edge, and which the comrades had now entered, could be seen the sails of a vessel at anchor, while upon the shore, not far away, were several men just landing from a boat.

Their picturesque costumes, the appearance of their vessel, both told the same story.

The men were pirates!

"A pirate vessel," cried Tom. "Can it be that—"

"No, yonder vessel is of a different build," returned the other. "This is not the death pirate, but I warrant that he is bad enough."

"Let us return to the boats. We may have an encounter with those gentlemen, and it is as well to be united."

"Look!" cried Iron Arm again. "Some of them have come upon this murderer, and they are bandying words. Ha, there they are, at it with dagger and cutlass. There'll be more blood spilled yet over that miserable bit of green stone."

When Dick reached the fallen maniac, he stooped over him and endeavored to take the stone from his fingers, exulting in the thought of possessing it.

"These silly stories cause me no fear," he muttered. "I am not a man to be frightened by such childish tales."

Then he tried to loosen the stone, but found that it was clutched more tightly than he had imagined.

Seizing the dead man's hand in his own, he wrenched the jewel from between the fingers and held it up to the light, laughing as he did so.

"Fire and furies!" he cried, as he looked at it. "It is not green, it is blood-red. What diabolical jugglery is this? Curses on the thing, it is a cheat!"

The blood-red shadow slowly passed off, leaving the stone green and sparkling as before, and the man laughed with fierce joy as he beheld it.

"'Twas but a fancy," he murmured. "How it sparkles! It is indeed well worth a king's ransom. Ha! what is that?"

The crackling of the twigs denoted that some one was approaching, or perhaps hidden in the bushes and watching him.

Before he could conceal the gem, three or four men appeared, dressed as pirates and wearing a fierce look upon their swarthy faces.

"It is a precious gem, indeed!" cried the foremost of the party, "and better befits men of our stamp than it does you."

"You shall not have it!" cried Dick, fiercely, drawing his dagger.

"No? We shall see."

"Who are you that dares dispute my title to this gem?"

"The Sea Wolf, and my comrades are the Tiger and the Fox. Give up the jewel and no harm shall befall you."

"I will not!"

"Upon him then!" cried the pirate, and at the word the three villains sprang forward, others approaching as the sound of clashing steel broke upon the air.

Dick fought with the utmost desperation, but he was soon surrounded, and as he parried a blow, dealt by the pirate captain, was stabbed in the back by one of his comrades.

He fell upon his face on the grass, and in an instant the man drove his steel once more deep into his side, and, thrusting his hand into his breast, took out the jewel.

"Give it to me!" cried the pirate, with an awful oath. "Give it to me, it is mine."

"'Twas my knife that let out the villain's blood, and the stone belongs to me."

"Dare you dispute my will?"

"I dare. You command only on the ship, not here."

"Then go aboard at once and await my coming."

"I am content to remain here. This man has companions doubtless upon the island. I will unite my fortunes to theirs."

"Not if I say you nay," remarked the pirate. "Seize him, men. He is a traitor, and will betray you to the men of yonder vessel, which is a man-of-war."

This was enough for the pirates, and they leaped upon the luckless possessor of the ill-starred emerald and bore him to the earth.

Their daggers drank his life's blood, and the jewel was wrenched from his hand by the pirate chief.

"Let him lie there and rot," hissed the Sea Wolf, "and let this be a warning to all traitors."

"He is killed," whispered Iron Arm, who, with Tom, had witnessed this whole scene. "Who can tell what may be the pirate's fate, now that he has the jewel?"

"If it compasses his destruction, and that of creatures like him, it will have somewhat atoned for the mischief it has done in the past. Ha! what sound is that? The pirates have discovered our hiding-place, and are advancing upon us!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LAST OF THE EMERALD.

"STAND firm," cried Tom. "We are but two, but we need not fear those demons!"

At that moment, a party of the pirates having discovered the two strangers, gave the alarm to the chief and his men, and by their advance the gallant young captain and his comrade suddenly found themselves hemmed in.

"Who are you?" demanded the Sea Wolf haughtily, as he came up.

"Captain Tom Drake, commander of the *Firefly*."

"A cruiser of the enemy."

"I don't know whom you may mean, unless you reckon all mankind as your enemies, but I am an American."

"All men are alike to me, that command war vessels. You are my prisoner."

"Don't be too hasty," spoke Iron Arm. "This gentleman owes no allegiance to pirates, and he has been no man's prisoner yet."

"Then he shall be mine. Yield up your arms upon the instant, or be cut down by my men."

"Never!" cried both men in a breath.

"Upon them!" yelled the enraged Sea Wolf.

If he had imagined that the two strangers would fall an easy prey, he was very much mistaken, for nothing was more improbable.

As the murderous wretches rushed forward, Iron Arm gave an exhibition of his wonderful strength, which was as startling as it was terrible.

Seizing one of the pirates by the head, he lifted him high in the air, and smote right and left with this novel weapon, bringing down all whom he struck.

Then, releasing the man, and whirling him rapidly around, he seized his feet and dashed into the midst of the pirates, braining full half a dozen with his now lifeless foe.

Throwing the body down, he rushed upon the pirate captain, who was now engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with Tom, and seizing him by the throat, hurled him to some distance, where he lay panting for breath.

"Look yonder! the demons are coming in perfect swarms!"

"Look again!" cried Tom, "do you not see our faithful *Fireflies* also approaching?"

This was true, for the men of the *Firefly*, having somehow discovered the presence of the pirates, had communicated the news to Harry Vere.

The latter, apprehending that Tom might be in peril, had dispatched a large force to the assistance of the captain, and those men, headed by Ben Barnacle, Bob and Jerry, were the party now approaching.

The two forces met, and a terrible battle was the result, the pirates hating honest tars as the arch-fiend is said to hate the light of a church, and fighting with the greatest ferocity.

During the *melee*, the Sea Wolf, knowing how the affair must end, crept away unobserved, and made his way to the shore, taking a part of his men, whom he met on his way, back with him, and making all haste to board the vessel.

It was not long before the pirates discovered his absence, and thinking that he was dead, began to lose heart.

The tars charged them and compelled them to retreat, leaving many dead on the field.

They made all haste to the shore, but when there discovered that the captain had deserted them, the pirate vessel being already under way.

They swore and raved, but finding this of no avail, fled in all directions to escape the fury of the sailors, who pursued them relentlessly.

Calling back his men, Tom allowed the wretches to escape, and then ordered a return to the *Firefly*, sufficient water having been obtained.

Shortly afterwards the gallant *Firefly* left the island behind, the abandoned pirates crying loudly to be taken on board.

They rushed down to the water's edge and begged to be taken off, but Tom had no fancy for such companions, and their prayers and curses were alike unheeded.

Meanwhile, the Sea Wolf had made all haste to leave the island, resolving to attack Tom later on under cover of the night, thinking that the latter would remain near the island.

His surprise may therefore be imagined when shortly afterward he beheld the American in full chase, evidently bent on his destruction.

The chase was an exciting one, but did not last long, owing to the better sailing qualities of Tom's vessel.

"Sink the accursed ship," he cried, "and spare not a single man. We will rid the seas of such vermin."

Shot after shot crashed through the enemy's rigging, and in a short time she was completely disabled, the *Firefly* being still unharmed.

"Sink her!" roared Tom, and a broadside was directed at her hull below the water-line with the intention of settling her case as quickly as possible.

"There may be treasure aboard," said Ben, as shot after shot struck the hull.

"I care nothing for it. The stain of blood is upon it, and I will touch none of it. Let us burn and destroy every trace of the villain."

When the vessel at last began to sink the Sea Wolf sprang upon the rail, and holding aloft something that gleamed and sparkled in the sunlight, exclaimed:

"If it is the gem you want, go look for it in the sea. I defy you to the last!"

It was the sea-emerald which he held, and as he spoke that red shade passed over its face.

Then came a sudden puff of white smoke; a column of fire shot up from the hold; a deafening report followed, and then all was obscured by a thick cloud of black smoke.

When this cleared away, and the waters subsided, not a trace of the pirate ship remained.

"That is the last of the emerald," said Tom.

"Thank Heaven! we shall never see or hear of it again."

And he never did, for from that day to this all trace of it has been lost, and the stone, with its curse of blood, no longer remains to bring misery and death upon all who desire its possession.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NEWS OF OLD ENEMIES.

FROM here Tom made his way to the West Indies, meeting a couple of British cruisers when near the Bermudas.

One of these he disabled, and then, as night was coming on, made good his escape, the other vessel being much larger and more heavily armed than his own.

When near the island of Cuba, he fell in with an American vessel, and learned of the many successes during his long absence, and of the glorious name made for themselves by Porter, Bainbridge, Hull and others, whose names have long been recorded in the temple of fame.

"The war is not over yet," said his informant, "but the imperious Englishmen have at last been obliged to acknowledge that she is not the mistress of the seas by any means, and that we are an enemy not to be despised."

There was considerable prize money due the *Firefly's* crew, and Tom determined to take a run home, pay his men, and start out again on a fresh voyage.

He accordingly made straight for port, and after making a few repairs, fitting up his vessel, and seeing Minnie safe among her friends, cruised along the coast for a period of six or eight months, meeting an occasional cruiser, after which he decided to run straight out to sea.

Constance Moreland had been restored to her friends, and now there seemed nothing to do but make one more search for Reuben, who was reported missing, and bring him to an account for his many crimes.

"I should like to have one more brush with him," muttered Jerry to Bob, one night. "I hope he's joined hands with that bloody-minded pirate

again, and then we can wipe 'em both out together."

"Look out or you may get into the stocks again," laughed Dr. Shrike, who was standing near. "H'm, I'd like to have been there that night. I'd have taken your ass ears off clean to your head."

"To fit on your own?" said Jerry. "You don't need 'em, old Cut-and-Slash. People will take ye for what ye are without any such ornaments."

"Ugh! monkey-face, wait till I get my hands on you. You won't be apt to talk so big."

"Monkey-face!" yelled the irate Jerry, slinging a belaying-pin at the eccentric surgeon. "Take yerself off, you blamed old cannibal, or I'll give Jacob a subject to practice on to-night."

The surgeon went away, growling as usual, and Bob and Jerry continued their conversation without further molestation.

Some weeks later, Tom fell in with an American privateer that had just come from Barbadoes, and from him he heard news of that old rascal, Israel Shawm, the Jew.

"He has done one bit of villainy too much," said Tom's informant, "and he won't trouble you any more."

"What was that?"

"Oh, he swindled one of the British captains, and then you know that affair of the *Night-Hawk* got out, and they would have it that Israel knew what he was about on that occasion, and purposely swindled the captain."

"Well, what happened?"

"Previous to that his daughter ran away with a good-looking Christian and took half his fortune. That nearly used him up, and then the government confiscated the other half."

"Served the old rascal right."

"But that wasn't all."

"No?"

"Indeed not, for the old shark was convicted of treason and of betraying a British vessel to the enemy, and was hanged for it. He swore like a pirate on the gallows, but the noose soon cut that short, and there was an end of all his mischief and scheming."

"And Hester?"

"She never was his daughter at all, but a child whom he had stolen. She was living happily, the last I heard of her, having married the fellow she went away with. The money she took was her own, but if it hadn't been, it would have served the old fox well to take it away."

Tom cruised around the West Indies for several months after this, when suddenly he heard news of the great depredations of a certain pirate whom he had no doubt was his old enemy of the death's head, who had played him such a trick with his mysterious jugglery in the cave, and he at once determined to go in pursuit of him.

"Do so," advised Ben, "and I do not doubt that you will find Reuben in his company."

"If I do I will rid the earth of two villains at one blow."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

READY FOR ACTION—THE PIRATE.

It was a lovely day in the fall of the year, the waves sparkling and dancing in the sunlight, and the air fresh and balmy.

The *Firefly*, under full sail, was scudding along over the waters, all hearts beating with glad emotions.

The plucky little vessel had lately been in several engagements, and had come off successful in all.

Many rich prizes had been sent home, and the men were in high spirits.

The war could not last much longer, the pride of the British being greatly broken.

The United States would soon be acknowledged to be a power not to be despised, and her place among the great nations of the earth was already an assured one.

But in spite of all this our hero felt that there was still work for him to do.

The mystery of his birth had never been satisfactorily cleared up, and, though that could not affect his high position in the least, he felt that he must discover the truth.

He had spoken to Ben upon the subject often, but the man was very uncommunicative, and generally managed to change the subject.

Then there was Reuben Harpy, Tom's villainous cousin.

There was no knowing what villainy he might commit at any moment, his soul being steeped in crime, and nothing pleased him so much as being mixed up in some hellish plot.

While the man lived there was no safety for Tom, and until he was swept from the earth Tom could never feel safe from his villainies in one form or another.

There were several mysteries besides to be

cleared up, and Tom determined that they should no longer remain to puzzle him, being determined to clear them up at once.

The *Firefly* was speeding along, this fine morning, the lookout being posted up aloft, keeping a sharp watch for vessels, friendly or otherwise, and every man was on the alert.

Visions of prize money filled their eyes, and under those circumstances, and flushed with victory, it was only natural that they were ready to exert themselves to the utmost.

Nothing succeeds like success, and this our worthy friends were well aware of; this last cruise of the sturdy little privateer being a notable example of the truth of the saying.

Every man aboard, from the captain to the tiniest midshipman, from the boatswain to the cook, was wide awake this day and ready for something startling.

And before that day should pass away, more than one startling event was to take place, which would make the famous name of Captain Tom Drake ring from one end of the land to the other.

"I kind o' feel it in my bones," remarked Jerry Mizzen to Bob Hauler, "that something is going to happen to-day."

"Not a doubt about it, Jerry. Something usually does aboard this craft. She's no sleepy old *Flying Dutchman*, I can tell you."

"Yes, yes, matey, but something out of the common."

"Perhaps Dr. Shrike will wash his shirt. That would be uncommon, and no mistake."

"Ha! still chattering, are you?" snapped the man alluded to, Bob having spoken thus upon seeing him approach.

"Sharpening up your tools, are ye?" asked Jerry, the man having a case of surgical instruments under his arm.

"They're all ready," he grunted in return, "and you may have a taste of them before the day is out."

"I'd rather be killed clean out than get under your dirty hands," returned Jerry, with a snort, "for then I'd be out of my misery, but the Lord help me if you ever get hold of me."

"It would be worse'n the time you fell into the enemy's hands, Mr. Jerry?" asked Bob, with a laugh.

"Quite right; or even when I got into the stocks. That was a rum go, wasn't it?"

"Sail ho!"

These words came from aloft, and in a moment all was excitement.

"Where away?" shouted Harry Vere, who was on the quarter-deck.

"Three p'int's off the lee-quarter, sir."

Harry sent an under-officer below, and in a moment Tom appeared on deck, glass in hand.

Scanning the horizon attentively for some moments, he cried:

"It is our old enemy, the pirate. Tack ship!"

"All hands ahoy!" called out the lieutenant.

The pipe sounded shrilly through the ship, and all hands flew to their posts.

"Haul up your mainsail! Down with your wheel!" came the order.

"Aye—aye, sir."

"Hard a-lee!"

"Let go your fore and jib-sheets!" shouted Ben, the wind being now ahead of about one point on the weather-bow.

"Let go it is, sir," muttered the men as they obeyed the order on the instant.

"Mainsail haul! Bring round your after-yards."

In a few moments the large mainsail began to fill, and then came the order in quick, sharp tones:

"Right up your wheel to meet her."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Fore bow-line! Let go and haul! Trim your foreyards! Haul down your foretack!"

Then, in an instant, while yet all hands seemed fully occupied:

"Haul aft your sheet! Trim the mainyards! Set the mainsail."

"Full and by!" said the quarter-master to the helmsman, and in another moment the *Firefly* was racing along upon a new tack, and bearing straight down upon the stranger.

That he was no stranger after all was soon apparent, however, for as the Stars and Stripes fluttered from the *Firefly's* peak, the black flag was seen to float above the mass of canvas upon the other vessel, and a shout of defiance went up from the *Firefly's* decks.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

"HA-HA! he shows his colors at last!" cried Tom.

Boom!

A flash, a puff, and the whizzing of a shot over the waters and a splash, the spray flying high in air.

"And his teeth, too," muttered Ben, under his breath.

"Of all the fights we have ever had with that demon, this will be the fiercest," said Iron Arm, as he brought a piece to bear upon the mystic ship.

"He speaks first, does he?" was Tom's comment. "Don't fire yet," he added: "save your powder and shot for close range."

"The fight will be the toughest yet," thought Ben. "Those who live to tell of it will indeed be fortunate."

Boom!

Another shot comes whizzing over the waves, but again it falls short.

"Down behind the bulwarks, every man!" cries Tom, "and let none show themselves until I give the order."

Below, on the gun-deck, and on the decks above as well, the men were ready for action, although a silence as of death rested over all the scene.

Port-holes had been opened, the guns frowning from the openings; piles of ammunition stood ready by each piece, and every man was in his accustomed place.

Pistols and cutlasses had been given all around, and there was not a single soul that was not thrilled with the utmost excitement, although all was so silent.

Boom!

Boom!

Again the stillness is broken, and again the hurtling messengers of death come shrieking through the air.

The vessels are nearer now, but as yet no sound has been heard from the *Firefly*.

"The villain dares not fight!" muttered the pirate chief, as he strode up and down his quarter-deck.

"He intends some treachery," returned a figure who accompanied the terrible buccaneer.

Can it be possible that the man so gorgeously dressed is our old acquaintance, Reuben Harpy?

It is he, indeed, his fortunes now being united with those of the death pirate.

The latter still wears that hideous mask, from behind which his baleful eyes glitter with a demoniac fire.

"What treachery do you mean?" he asks, moodily.

"He fears to fight you upon even terms, and when he gets up close, will blow up his ship."

Such language does not sound strange from Reuben's lips, for, being false and treacherous himself, he imagines every one else to be the same.

"Bah!" mutters the pirate. "I do not care if he does. I have sworn to kill him the next time we meet, and what care I what he does if he assists me in my task, so much the better."

"Pour in a broadside and wake him up. Make the coward fight!"

Coward, indeed!

Such a word sounds well, indeed, in the mouth of such a miscreant.

Boom!

The pirate has opened fire with all his guns, and the ship fairly reels beneath the shock.

The air is filled with dense smoke, but still not a sound comes from the *Firefly*.

The smoke clears away and she is seen, perfectly unharmed, bearing swiftly down upon them, though not a man is visible.

"Death and furies!" gasps the pirate under his breath, his fingers working convulsively; "can nothing harm them?"

"They are armed with steel plates," said Reuben. "Aim at the rigging and you will cripple them."

Before the guns could be trained to throw the shot to the right height, however, the *Firefly* is within a cable's length.

Then a boyish form suddenly springs up, and waving his glittering sword, cries fiercely:

"Now, then, my brave boys, do your work! Give them thunder and lightning!"

It is Captain Tom who speaks, and in another instant comes the thrilling command:

"FIRE!"

Scarcely before the echo of the word ceases to greet the ear there comes from the portholes of the *Firefly* a solid column of fire, and the air is filled with flying missiles.

Then from the upper decks comes another avalanche of the deadly messengers, and the smoke is fairly stifling.

A burning, blistering rain of steel and iron falls upon the pirate's deck, and she staggers under the shock.

Crash!

Boom!

Thud!

Then the two vessels come together with a noise like thunder, while above all the din of booming cannon sounds the voice of Captain Tom:

"No quarter! Wipe the villains forever from the face of the earth!"

"Spare none!" yells the pirate. "And above all, kill that young braggart. A hundred pounds to the man who brings me his head!"

The two vessels are now firmly lashed together, and now a fight at close quarters begins, the guns being silent.

"Now look out for sport," mutters Jerry, "for the man that comes out alive from this scrimmage will have something to tell of."

"Follow me, my brave lads," cries Tom, and in another moment he is upon the pirate's deck, followed by Vere, Iron Arm, Ben, and a score of his bravest followers.

It is a fight at close quarters indeed, for the freebooters now come swarming from below, all armed to the teeth, and all determined to fight till the end.

The deck is crowded with one mass of struggling combatants, sword clashing against sword, cutlass against cutlass, while at short intervals the report of pistols is heard amid the din.

"Death to the pirate!" cries Tom, and, pushing his way through the crowd towards the quarter-deck, he suddenly comes face to face with his old enemy, the arch traitor and villain, the renegade and pitiable coward, Reuben Harpy himself.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TOM SEES THE PIRATE'S FACE.

"STAND aside, miserable wretch!" cries Tom, dashing Reuben's sword to the deck. "It is not you I seek, but your master."

Then he leaps forward, stretching more than one brawny pirate at his feet, and at one bound springs upon the quarter-deck.

"Now, villain, I mean to see your face!" he hisses, and aims a blow at the pirate's head.

Crash!

The blow falls full upon the pirate's skull, and a shower of sparks follow.

The trusty sword is shivered with the force of the shock, and the blade, broken in several pieces, falls to the deck.

Quick as lightning, Tom draws a pistol and aims at the grinning mask.

Crack!

Crash!

The report rings out upon the air, and the bullet speeds to its work.

Then with a dull sound it strikes some hard substance and falls to the deck, flattened out of shape.

With a cry of disappointed rage, Tom leaps forward, and fairly wrenching the sword from the pirate's grasp, hurls it from him, and seizes the strange being by the throat.

They are at once surrounded by a crowd of angry men, pirates and honest sailors, all struggling most fiercely.

Harry Vere is below on the main deck fighting hand to hand with Reuben, while Jerry heads a party that are struggling with the pirates for the mastery of the forward part of the vessel.

Ben and Iron Arm are both on the quarter-deck, and wherever they go blood flows like water, the havoc being something frightful to witness.

"Save that noble boy, Howard, for the love of Heaven!" says Ben to his giant companion, "I feel my strength leaving me."

"Aye, that I will, Paul; but you must not succumb yet, while there is yet so much to be done."

Meanwhile Tom had seized the pirate by the throat in the attempt to tear off his mask, and both were struggling most frantically.

Tom felt the touch of cold steel beneath his fingers, and realized at once why his bullet had failed to do its work.

The man wore a helmet of steel firmly riveted to a heavy gorget setting upon his shoulders, under this again being a shirt of mail, which nothing could penetrate.

"Villain!" hissed Tom, "I will see your face, come what may!"

Then he threw the ruffian to the deck and knelt upon his breast, his dagger poised above the man's eyes, which glittered with a deadly light.

Suddenly Iron Arm uttered a cry, and dashing

forward smote a man upon the head with his naked fist with a force that broke his skull and spattered Tom with blood.

The wretch had been upon the point of stabbing our young hero in the back when Iron Arm had seen him in the nick of time.

Striking right and left, he hurled the pirates into the sea, and then springing forward put one knee upon the chief's neck and cried:

"Now, Henri, your time has come, and your career of crime is at an end. Acknowledge yourself and yield!"

"Never!" hissed the man, fiercely.

At that moment a cry of agony was heard from Ben, and then came the sound of a falling body.

"Tom!" cried the man, "help, for God's sake! I am dying!"

Tom forgot all else, and leaping from the prostrate pirate rushed to Ben's assistance.

The death-pirate sprang to his feet, but Iron Arm was upon him in an instant, and seizing his head in both hands wrenched the frightful mask apart and threw it from him.

The face of the death-pirate was at last revealed.

It was dark and forbidding, the lower part being covered with a close, black beard.

Its aspect was stern and fierce, rendered more so by a terrible scar, red and livid, which extended clear across the forehead.

But what surprised one more than anything else was the remarkable resemblance that the man bore to Ben Barnacle, the boatswain.

"Alas! poor Ben is dead!" cried Tom at that moment.

"Behold!" cried Iron Arm.

Tom leaped to his feet, and seeing the pirate's face for the first time, cried excitedly:

"My God! Who is this man?"

"The father of Reuben Harpy, the husband of your mother's half-sister, and my own cousin!"

"Villains! then do I defeat you all!" cried the man, and throwing his arms around the form of the giant gunner, leaped with him into the sea.

There was a splash, and both men sank beneath the waves, but nevermore arose again, the billows rolling over the spot where they had disappeared forever, and sealing for all time the book of mystery, at which Tom had caught but one brief glance.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MYSTERY IS CLEARED AWAY—CONCLUSION.

THE battle, though interrupted, was not finished by any means, and was quickly resumed with full vigor.

Though their leader was dead, the pirates still fought with their old-time ferocity, and the decks literally ran with blood.

Disarming Reuben by a clever stroke, Harry Vere cleft the villain's skull in twain, and stretched him lifeless upon the deck.

"At last you are avenged, my best friend," he cried, "and Tom Drake's hand is not stained with this villain's blood."

Jerry Mizzen, wounded and nearly exhausted, had at this moment gained the victory he had so dearly fought for, and the pirates were hurled into the sea or killed where they stood.

Poor Jerry, however, would never live to tell of his triumph, for when the shouts of victory rang in his ear, he sank back into Bob's arms, the latter having just come up, and said:

"Good-bye, Bob. You and I have been good chums, haven't we?"

"We have so, Jerry," said Bob, his eyes beginning to moisten.

"I made a good fight of it, didn't I, Bob?"

"You did so, old friend."

"You'll tell 'em about this, when you get home?"

"To be sure."

"And I say, Bob?" his voice beginning to grow faint.

"Well?"

"Bury me in the sea, won't you?"

"Surely."

"With my best suit on and this good old cutlass by my side?"

"I'll put it in your fist, old man, for that's where it belongs."

"And another thing, Bob?"

"Well?"

"Don't let Shrike get ahold of me, will you?"

"He shan't so much as cut a lock off yer top-knot, Jerry."

"That's good. You'll remember me, won't you, Bob?"

"No danger o' my ever forgettin' you. Me and you has had too many good times together for that."

"Tell Captain Tom—"

"He's here, Jerry. The fight is over, and them as hasn't been killed or chucked overboard has surrendered."

"Will he speak to me?" asked Jerry, growing weaker, his breath now coming in fitful gasps.

"Aye, that he will, and be glad to do it. Abo, there, Captain Tom! Poor Jerry is about to slip his cable, and he wants to speak to you."

Tom, with Vere at his side, hastened forward, and bending over the dying man, said gently:

"Ah, Jerry, my man, you were always an old friend of mine, and I shall be sorry to lose you. What would you say to me?"

"Ben Barnacle knows something that interests you, captain, and tell him that I say he mustn't keep his secret any longer."

"Ben can tell nothing now, Jerry, for he is dead."

"Ben Barnacle dead?"

"Yes."

"Then you want to take a packet what he always carried in his breast and open it. That will tell—"

"I have the packet, Jerry. He gave it to me in his last moments."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all right, and I've no more to say. Read that 'ere packet, and you'll learn more'n I can tell you. Good-bye, Captain Tom, and God bless you."

"And God bless you for an honest tar and a faithful friend," cried Tom, pressing the dying man's hand.

Jerry raised that hand to his lips, with his last remaining strength, kissed it, and then fell back in Bob's hands, dead.

"There goes one o' the best fellows that ever lived," muttered Bob, wiping his eyes. "I won't find such another if I live to be a thousand years old."

"Back to our ship!" cried Harry, "the pirate vessel is on fire, and is sinking as well."

They quickly hastened over to the *Firefly*, bearing the dead and wounded of their own party, but leaving the pirate dead on the bloody deck.

The *Firefly* quickly drew away, and none too soon, for in another minute she would have caught afire from the close proximity of the pirate ship.

The latter drifted away, and before she sank from sight behind the horizon, blew up, the flames having reached the magazine.

This, then, was the last of the mystic ship and her dread commander, and from that time forth, piracy declined, having received a blow which eventually proved its ruin.

The body of Reuben Harpy was left upon the vessel and was thus destroyed, this fate being a fitting ending to a life-long career of crime and wickedness.

Iron Arm never re-appeared, though the mystery surrounding him had been somewhat cleared up by his own declaration at the time of the unmasking of the pirate.

The packet which Ben had spoken of was opened, and then it was discovered that the boatswain was Tom's own father, and the brother of the death pirate!

He had never made himself known to Tom on account of certain events which had occurred in his youth and of which he was ashamed, having been a pirate with his brother, but, although never acknowledging himself, he had always kept a watchful eye upon Tom's interests, and it was to him that our hero owed much of his advancement.

Now he was gone, however, and Tom, respecting his secret, still retained the name of Drake, and with it won distinction in his struggles for his country.

The war was ended at last, and Tom, covered with glory, returned to his darling Minnie while the country rang with the praise of its naval heroes, among them, and by no means the least, being that of our old friend and hero, of whom we now take a final adieu, the gallant PRIVATEER TOM.

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